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# KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK AND OTHER STORIES

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LONDON  
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1922





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# KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

## A STUDY

### I

WE all settled down in a circle and our good friend Alexandr Vassilyevitch Ridel (his surname was German but he was Russian to the marrow of his bones) began as follows:

I am going to tell you a story, friends, of something that happened to me in the 'thirties . . . forty years ago as you see. I will be brief—and don't you interrupt me.

I was living at the time in Petersburg and had only just left the University. My brother was a lieutenant in the horse-guard artillery. His battery was stationed at Krasnoe Selo—it was summer time. My brother lodged not at Krasnoe Selo itself but in one of the neigh-

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bouring villages ; I stayed with him more than once and made the acquaintance of all his comrades. He was living in a fairly decent cottage, together with another officer of his battery, whose name was Ilya Stepanitch Tyeglev. I became particularly friendly with him.

Marlinsky is out of date now—no one reads him—and even his name is jeered at ; but in the 'thirties his fame was above everyone's—and in the opinion of the young people of the day Pushkin could not hold a candle to him. He not only enjoyed the reputation of being the foremost Russian writer ; but—something much more difficult and more rarely met with—he did to some extent leave his mark on his generation. One came across heroes *à la* Marlinsky everywhere, especially in the provinces and especially among infantry and artillery men ; they talked and corresponded in his language ; behaved with gloomy reserve in society—"with tempest in the soul and flame in the blood" like Lieutenant Byelosov in the "*Frigate Hope*." Women's hearts were "devoured" by them. The adjective applied to them in those days was "fatal." The type, as we all know, survived

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for many years, to the days of Petchorin.\* All sorts of elements were mingled in that type. Byronism, romanticism, reminiscences of the French Revolution, of the Dekabrists—and the worship of Napoleon; faith in destiny, in one's star, in strength of will; pose and fine phrases—and a miserable sense of the emptiness of life; uneasy pangs of petty vanity—and genuine strength and daring; generous impulses—and defective education, ignorance; aristocratic airs—and delight in trivial foppery. . . . But enough of these general reflections. I promised to tell you the story.

## II

Lieutenant Tyeglev belonged precisely to the class of those "fatal" individuals, though he did not possess the exterior commonly associated with them; he was not, for instance, in the least like Lermontov's "fatalist." He was a man of medium height, fairly solid and round-shouldered, with fair, almost white eyebrows and eyelashes; he had a round, fresh, rosy-

\* The leading character in Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*.—Translator's Note.

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cheeked face, a turn-up nose, a low forehead with the hair growing thick over the temples, and full, well-shaped, always immobile lips: he never laughed, never even smiled. Only when he was tired and out of heart he showed his square teeth, white as sugar. The same artificial immobility was imprinted on all his features: had it not been for that, they would have had a good-natured expression. His small green eyes with yellow lashes were the only thing not quite ordinary in his face: his right eye was very slightly higher than his left and the left eyelid drooped a little, which made his eyes look different, strange and drowsy. Tyeglev's countenance, which was not, however, without a certain attractiveness, almost always wore an expression of discontent mingled with perplexity, as though he were chasing within himself a gloomy thought which he was never able to catch. At the same time he did not give one the impression of being stuck up: he might rather have been taken for an aggrieved than a haughty man. He spoke very little, hesitatingly, in a husky voice, with unnecessary repetitions. Unlike most "fatalists," he did not

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use particularly elaborate expressions in speaking and only had recourse to them in writing; his handwriting was quite like a child's. His superiors regarded him as an officer of no great merit—not particularly capable and not over-zealous. The brigadier-general, a man of German extraction, used to say of him: "He has punctuality but not precision." With the soldiers, too, Tyeglev had the character of being neither one thing nor the other. He lived modestly, in accordance with his means. He had been left an orphan at nine years old: his father and mother were drowned when they were being ferried across the Oka in the spring floods. He had been educated at a private school, where he had the reputation of being one of the slowest and quietest of the boys, and at his own earnest desire and through the good offices of a cousin who was a man of influence, he obtained a commission in the horse-guards artillery; and, though with some difficulty, passed his examination first as an ensign and then as a second lieutenant. His relations with other officers were somewhat strained. He was not liked, was rarely visited



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—and he hardly went to see anyone. He felt the presence of strangers a constraint; he instantly became awkward and unnatural . . . he had no instinct for comradeship and was not on really intimate terms with anyone. But he was respected, and respected not for his character nor for his intelligence and education—but because the stamp which distinguishes “fatal” people was discerned in him. No one of his fellow officers expected that Tyeglev would make a career or distinguish himself in any way; but that Tyeglev might do something extraordinary or that Tyeglev might become a Napoleon was not considered impossible. For that is a matter of a man’s “star”—and he was regarded as a “man of destiny,” just as there are “men of sighs” and “of tears.”

### III

Two incidents that marked the first steps in his career did a great deal to strengthen his “fatal” reputation. On the very first day after receiving his commission—about the middle of March—he was walking with other newly promoted officers in full dress uniform along the

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embankment. The spring had come early that year, the Neva was melting; the bigger blocks of ice had gone but the whole river was choked up with a dense mass of thawing icicles. The young men were talking and laughing . . . suddenly one of them stopped: he saw a little dog some twenty paces from the bank on the slowly moving surface of the river. Perched on a projecting piece of ice it was whining and trembling all over. "It will be drowned," said the officer through his teeth. The dog was slowly being carried past one of the sloping gangways that led down to the river. All at once Tyeglev without saying a word ran down this gangway and over the thin ice, sinking in and leaping out again, reached the dog, seized it by the scruff of the neck and getting safely back to the bank, put it down on the pavement. The danger to which Tyeglev had exposed himself was so great, his action was so unexpected, that his companions were dumbfounded—and only spoke all at once, when he had called a cab to drive home: his uniform was wet all over. In response to their exclamations, Tyeglev replied coolly that there was no escaping

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one's destiny—and told the cabman to drive on.

"You might at least take the dog with you as a souvenir," cried one of the officers. But Tyeglev merely waved his hand, and his comrades looked at each other in silent amazement.

The second incident occurred a few days later, at a card party at the battery commander's. Tyeglev sat in the corner and took no part in the play. "Oh, if only I had a grandmother to tell me beforehand what cards will win, as in Pushkin's *Queen of Spades*," cried a lieutenant whose losses had nearly reached three thousand. Tyeglev approached the table in silence, took up a pack, cut it, and saying "the six of diamonds," turned the pack up: the six of diamonds was the bottom card. "The ace of clubs!" he said and cut again: the bottom card turned out to be the ace of clubs. "The king of diamonds!" he said for the third time in an angry whisper through his clenched teeth—and he was right the third time, too . . . and he suddenly turned crimson. He probably had not expected it himself. "A capital trick! Do it again," observed the commanding officer of the battery. "I don't go in for

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tricks," Tyeglev answered drily and walked into the other room. How it happened that he guessed the card right, I can't pretend to explain: but I saw it with my own eyes. Many of the players present tried to do the same—and not one of them succeeded: one or two did guess *one* card but never two in succession. And Tyeglev had guessed three! This incident strengthened still further his reputation as a mysterious, fatal character. It has often occurred to me since that if he had not succeeded in the trick with the cards, there is no knowing what turn it would have taken and how he would have looked at himself; but this unexpected success clinched the matter.

### IV

It may well be understood that Tyeglev clutched at this reputation. It gave him a special significance, a special colour . . . "*Cela le posait*," as the French express it—and with his limited intelligence, scanty education and immense vanity, such a réputation just suited him. It was difficult to acquire it but to keep it up cost nothing: he had only to remain silent and

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hold himself aloof. But it was not owing to this reputation that I made friends with Tyeglev and, I may say, grew fond of him. I liked him in the first place because I was rather an unsociable creature myself—and saw in him one of my own sort, and secondly, because he was a very good-natured fellow and in reality, very simple-hearted. He aroused in me a feeling of something like compassion; it seemed to me that apart from his affected “fatality,” he really was weighed down by a tragic fate which he did not himself suspect. I need hardly say I did not express this feeling to him: could anything be more insulting to a “fatal” hero than to be an object of pity? And Tyeglev, on his side, was well-disposed to me; with me he felt at ease, with me he used to talk—in my presence he ventured to leave the strange pedestal on which he had been placed either by his own efforts or by chance. Agonisingly, morbidly vain as he was, yet he was probably aware in the depths of his soul that there was nothing to justify his vanity, and that others might perhaps look down on him . . . but I, a boy of nineteen, put no constraint on him; the dread of say-

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ing something stupid, inappropriate, did not oppress his ever-apprehensive heart in my presence. He sometimes even chattered freely; and well it was for him that no one heard his chatter except me! His reputation would not have lasted long. He not only knew very little, but read hardly anything and confined himself to picking up stories and anecdotes of a certain kind. He believed in presentiments, predictions, omens, meetings, lucky and unlucky days, in the persecution and benevolence of destiny, in the mysterious significance of life, in fact. He even believed in certain "climacteric" years which someone had mentioned in his presence and the meaning of which he did not himself very well understand. "Fatal" men of the true stamp ought not to betray such beliefs; they ought to inspire them in others. . . . But I was the only one who knew Tyeglev on that side.

### v

One day—I remember it was St. Elijah's day, July 20th—I came to stay with my brother and did not find him at home: he had been ordered off for a whole week somewhere. I did

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not want to go back to Petersburg; I sauntered about the neighbouring marshes, killed a brace of snipe and spent the evening with Tyeglev under the shelter of an empty barn where he had, as he expressed it, set up his summer residence. We had a little conversation but for the most part drank tea, smoked pipes and talked sometimes to our host, a Russianised Finn or to the pedlar who used to hang about the battery selling "fi-ine oranges and lemons," a charming and lively person who in addition to other talents could play the guitar and used to tell us of the unhappy love which he cherished in his young days for the daughter of a policeman. Now that he was older, this Don Juan in a gay cotton shirt had no experience of unsuccessful love affairs. Before the doors of our barn stretched a wide plain gradually sloping away in the distance; a little river gleamed here and there in the winding hollows; low growing woods could be seen further on the horizon. Night was coming on and we were left alone. As night fell a fine damp mist descended upon the earth, and, growing thicker and thicker, passed into a dense fog. The

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moon rose up into the sky; the fog was soaked through and through and, as it were, shimmering with golden light. Everything was strangely shifting, veiled and confused; the far-away looked near, the near looked far away, what was big looked small and what was small looked big . . . everything became dim and full of light. We seemed to be in fairyland, in a world of whitish-golden mist, deep stillness, delicate sleep. . . . And how mysteriously, like sparks of silver, the stars filtered through the mist! We were both silent. The fantastic beauty of the night worked upon us: it put us into the mood for the fantastic.

## VI

Tyeglev was the first to speak and talked with his usual hesitating incompleted sentences and repetitions about presentiments . . . about ghosts. On exactly such a night, according to him, one of his friends, a student who had just taken the place of tutor to two orphans and was sleeping with them in a lodge in the garden, saw a woman's figure bending over their beds and next day recognised the figure in a



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portrait of the mother of the orphans which he had not previously noticed. Then Tyeglev told me that his parents had heard for several days before their death the sound of rushing water; that his grandfather had been saved from death in the battle of Borodino through suddenly stooping down to pick up a simple grey pebble at the very instant when a volley of grape-shot flew over his head and broke his long black plume. Tyeglev even promised to show me the very pebble which had saved his grandfather and which he had mounted into a medallion. Then he talked of the lofty destination of every man and of his own in particular and added that he still believed in it and that if he ever had any doubts on that subject he would know how to be rid of them and of his life, as life would then lose all significance for him. "You imagine perhaps," he brought out, glancing askance at me, "that I shouldn't have the spirit to do it? You don't know me . . . I have a will of iron."

"Well said," I thought to myself.

Tyeglev pondered, heaved a deep sigh and dropping his chibouk out of his hand, informed

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me that that day was a very important one for him. "This is the prophet Elijah's day—my name day. . . . It is . . . it is always for me a difficult time."

I made no answer and only looked at him as he sat facing me, bent, round-shouldered, and clumsy, with his drowsy, lustreless eyes fixed on the ground.

"An old beggar woman" (Tyeglev never let a single beggar pass without giving alms) "told me to-day," he went on, "that she would pray for my soul. . . . Isn't that strange?"

"Why does the man want to be always bothering about himself!" I thought again. I must add, however, that of late I had begun noticing an unusual expression of anxiety and uneasiness on Tyeglev's face, and it was not a "fatal" melancholy: something really was fretting and worrying him. On this occasion, too, I was struck by the dejected expression of his face. Were not those very doubts of which he had spoken to me beginning to assail him? Tyeglev's comrades had told me that not long before he had sent to the authorities a project for some reforms in the artillery depart-

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ment and that the project had been returned to him "with a comment," that is, a reprimand. Knowing his character, I had no doubt that such contemptuous treatment by his superior officers had deeply mortified him. But the change that I fancied I saw in Tyeglev was more like sadness and there was a more personal note about it.

"It's getting damp, though," he brought out at last and he shrugged his shoulders. "Let us go into the hut—and it's bed-time, too." He had the habit of shrugging his shoulders and turning his head from side to side, putting his right hand to his throat as he did so, as though his cravat were constricting it. Tyeglev's character was expressed, so at least it seemed to me, in this uneasy and nervous movement. He, too, felt constricted in the world.

We went back into the hut, and both lay down on benches, he in the corner facing the door and I on the opposite side.

## VII

Tyeglev was for a long time turning from side to side on his bench and I could not get to

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sleep, either. Whether his stories had excited my nerves or the strange night had fevered my blood—anyway, I could not go to sleep. All inclination for sleep disappeared at last and I lay with my eyes open and thought, thought intensely, goodness knows of what; of most senseless trifles—as always happens when one is sleepless. Turning from side to side I stretched out my hands. . . . My finger hit one of the beams of the wall. It emitted a faint but resounding, and as it were, prolonged note. . . . I must have struck a hollow place.

I tapped again . . . this time on purpose. The same sound was repeated. I knocked again. . . . All at once Tyeglev raised his head.

"Ridel!" he said, "do you hear? Someone is knocking under the window."

I pretended to be asleep. The fancy suddenly took me to play a trick at the expense of my "fatal" friend. I could not sleep, anyway.

He let his head sink on the pillow. I waited for a little and again knocked three times in succession.

Tyeglev sat up again and listened. I tapped

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again. I was lying facing him but he could not see my hand. . . . I put it behind me under the bedclothes.

"Ridel!" cried Tyeglev.

I did not answer.

"Ridel!" he repeated loudly. "Ridel!"

"Eh? What is it?" I said as though just waking up.

"Don't you hear, someone keeps knocking under the window, wants to come in, I suppose."

"Some passer-by," I muttered.

"Then we must let him in or find out who it is."

But I made no answer, pretending to be asleep.

Several minutes passed. . . . I tapped again. Tyeglev sat up at once and listened.

"Knock . . . knock . . . knock! Knock . . . knock . . . knock!"

Through my half-closed eyelids in the whitish light of the night I could distinctly see every movement he made. He turned his face first to the window then to the door. It certainly was difficult to make out where the sound

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came from: it seemed to float round the room, to glide along the walls. I had accidentally hit upon a kind of sounding board.

"Ridel!" cried Tyeglev at last, "Ridel! Ridel!"

"Why, what is it?" I asked, yawning.

"Do you mean to say you don't hear anything? There is someone knocking."

"Well, what if there is?" I answered and again pretended to be asleep and even snored.

Tyeglev subsided.

"Knock . . . knock . . . knock!"

"Who is there?" Tyeglev shouted. "Come in!"

No one answered, of course.

"Knock . . . knock . . . knock!"

Tyeglev jumped out of bed, opened the window and thrusting out his head, cried wildly, "Who is there? Who is knocking?" Then he opened the door and repeated his question. A horse neighed in the distance—that was all.

He went back towards his bed.

"Knock . . . knock . . . knock!"

Tyeglev instantly turned round and sat down.

"Knock . . . knock . . . knock!"

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He rapidly put on his boots, threw his overcoat over his shoulders and unhooking his sword from the wall, went out of the hut. I heard him walk round it twice, asking all the time, "Who is there? Who goes there? Who is knocking?" Then he was suddenly silent, stood still outside near the corner where I was lying and without uttering another word, came back into the hut and lay down without taking off his boots and overcoat.

"Knock . . . knock . . . knock!" I began again.  
"Knock . . . knock . . . knock!"

But Tyeglev did not stir, did not ask who was knocking, and merely propped his head on his hand.

Seeing that this no longer acted, after an interval I pretended to wake up and, looking at Tyeglev, assumed an air of astonishment.

"Have you been out?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered unconcernedly.

"Did you still hear the knocking?"

"Yes."

"And you met no one?"

"No."

"And did the knocking stop?"

"I don't know. I don't care now."

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"Now? Why now?"

Tyeglev did not answer.

I felt a little ashamed and a little vexed with him. I could not bring myself to acknowledge my prank, however.

"Do you know what?" I began, "I am convinced that it was all your imagination."

Tyeglev frowned. "Ah, you think so!"

"You say you heard a knocking?"

"It was not only knocking I heard."

"Why, what else?"

Tyeglev bent forward and bit his lips. He was evidently hesitating.

"I was called!" he brought out at last in a low voice and turned away his face.

"You were called? Who called you?"

"Someone. . . ." Tyeglev still looked away. "A woman whom I had hitherto only believed to be dead . . . but now I know it for certain."

"I swear, Ilya Stepanitch," I cried, "this is all your imagination!"

"Imagination?" he repeated. "Would you like to hear it for yourself?"

"Yes."

"Then come outside."



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### VIII

I hurriedly dressed and went out of the hut with Tyeglev. On the side opposite to it there were no houses, nothing but a low hurdle fence broken down in places, beyond which there was a rather sharp slope down to the plain. Everything was still shrouded in mist and one could scarcely see anything twenty paces away. Tyeglev and I went up to the hurdle and stood still.

"Here," he said and bowed his head. "Stand still, keep quiet and listen!"

Like him I strained my ears, and I heard nothing except the ordinary, extremely faint but universal murmur, the breathing of the night. Looking at each other in silence from time to time we stood motionless for several minutes and were just on the point of going on.

"Ilyusha . . ." I fancied I heard a whisper from behind the hurdle.

I glanced at Tyeglev but he seemed to have heard nothing—and still held his head bowed.

"Ilyusha . . . ah, Ilyusha," sounded more

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distinctly than before—so distinctly that one could tell that the words were uttered by a woman.

We both started and stared at each other.

“Well?” Tyeglev asked me in a whisper. “You won’t doubt it now, will you?”

“Wait a minute,” I answered as quietly. “It proves nothing. We must look whether there isn’t anyone. Some practical joker. . . .”

I jumped over the fence—and went in the direction from which, as far as I could judge, the voice came.

I felt the earth soft and crumbling under my feet; long ridges stretched before me vanishing into the mist. I was in the kitchen garden. But nothing was stirring around me or before me. Everything seemed spellbound in the numbness of sleep. I went a few steps further.

“Who is there?” I cried as wildly as Tyeglev had.

“Prrr-r-r!” a startled corn-crake flew up almost under my feet and flew away as straight as a bullet. Involuntarily I started. . . . What foolishness!

I looked back. Tyeglev was in sight at the

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spot where I left him. I went towards him.

"You will call in vain," he said. "That voice has come to us—to me—from far away."

He passed his hand over his face and with slow steps crossed the road towards the hut. But I did not want to give in so quickly and went back into the kitchen garden. That someone really had three times called "Ilyusha" I could not doubt; that there was something plaintive and mysterious in the call, I was forced to own to myself. . . . But who knows, perhaps all this only appeared to be unaccountable and in reality could be explained as simply as the knocking which had agitated Tyeglev so much.

I walked along beside the fence, stopping from time to time and looking about me. Close to the fence, at no great distance from our hut, there stood an old leafy willow tree; it stood out, a big dark patch, against the whiteness of the mist all round, that dim whiteness which perplexes and deadens the sight more than darkness itself. All at once it seemed to me that something alive, fairly big, stirred on

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the ground near the willow. Exclaiming "Stop! Who is there?" I rushed forward. I heard scurrying footsteps, like a hare's; a crouching figure whisked by me, whether man or woman I could not tell. . . . I tried to clutch at it but did not succeed; I stumbled, fell down and stung my face against a nettle. As I was getting up, leaning on the ground, I felt something rough under my hand: it was a chased brass comb on a cord, such as peasants wear on their belt.

Further search led to nothing—and I went back to the hut with the comb in my hand, and my cheeks tingling.

## IX

I found Tyeglev sitting on the bench. A candle was burning on the table before him and he was writing something in a little album which he always had with him. Seeing me, he quickly put the album in his pocket and began filling his pipe.

"Look here, my friend," I began, "what a trophy I have brought back from my expedition!" I showed him the comb and told him

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what had happened to me near the willow. "I must have startled a thief," I added. "You heard a horse was stolen from our neighbour yesterday?"

Tyeglev smiled frigidly and lighted his pipe. I sat down beside him.

"And do you still believe, Ilya Stepanitch," I said, "that the voice we heard came from those unknown realms . . ."

He stopped me with a peremptory gesture.

"Ridel," he began, "I am in no mood for jesting, and so I beg you not to jest."

He certainly was in no mood for jesting. His face was changed. It looked paler, longer and more expressive. His strange, "different" eyes kept shifting from one object to another.

"I never thought," he began again, "that I should reveal to another . . . another man what you are about to hear and what ought to have died . . . yes, died, hidden in my breast; but it seems it is to be—and indeed I have no choice. It is destiny! Listen."

And he told me a long story.

I have mentioned already that he was a poor hand at telling stories, but it was not only his

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lack of skill in describing events that had happened to him that impressed me that night; the very sound of his voice, his glances, the movements which he made with his fingers and his hands—everything about him, indeed, seemed unnatural, unnecessary, false, in fact. I was very young and inexperienced in those days and did not know that the habit of high-flown language and falsity of intonation and manner may become so ingrained in a man that he is incapable of shaking it off: it is a sort of curse. Later in life I came across a lady who described to me the effect on her of her son's death, of her "boundless" grief, of her fears for her reason, in such exaggerated language, with such theatrical gestures, such melodramatic movements of her head and rolling of her eyes, that I thought to myself, "How false and affected that lady is! She did not love her son at all!" And a week afterwards I heard that the poor woman had really gone out of her mind. Since then I have become much more careful in my judgments and have had far less confidence in my own impressions.

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### x

The story which Tyeglev told me was, briefly, as follows. He had living in Petersburg, besides his influential uncle, an aunt, not influential but wealthy. As she had no children of her own she had adopted a little girl, an orphan, of the working class, given her a liberal education and treated her like a daughter. She was called Masha. Tyeglev saw her almost every day. It ended in their falling in love with one another and Masha's giving herself to him. This was discovered. Tyeglev's aunt was fearfully incensed, she turned the luckless girl out of her house in disgrace, and moved to Moscow where she adopted a young lady of noble birth and made her her heiress. On her return to her own relations, poor and drunken people, Masha's lot was a bitter one. Tyeglev had promised to marry her and did not keep his promise. At his last interview with her, he was forced to speak out: she wanted to know the truth and wrung it out of him. "Well," she said, "if I am not to be your wife, I know what there is left for me to do." More

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than a fortnight had passed since that last interview.

"I never for a moment deceived myself as to the meaning of her last words," added Tyeglev. "I am certain that she has put an end to her life and . . . and that it was *her* voice, that it was *she* calling me . . . to follow her there . . . I *recognised* her voice. . . . Well, there is but one end to it."

"But why didn't you marry her, Ilya Step-anitch?" I asked. "You ceased to love her?"

"No; I still love her passionately."

At this point I stared at Tyeglev. I remembered another friend of mine, a very intelligent man, who had a very plain wife, neither in telligent nor rich and was very unhappy in his marriage. When someone in my presence asked him why he had married and suggested that it was probably for love, he answered, "Not for love at all. It simply happened." And in this case Tyeglev loved a girl passionately and did not marry her. Was it for the same reason, then?

"Why don't you marry her, then?" I asked again.



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Tyeglev's strange, drowsy eyes strayed over the table.

"There is . . . no answering that . . . in a few words," he began, hesitating. "There were reasons. . . . And besides, she was . . . a working-class girl. And then there is my uncle. : . . I was obliged to consider him, too."

"Your uncle?" I cried. "But what the devil do you want with your uncle whom you never see except at the New Year when you go to congratulate him? Are you reckoning on his money? But he has got a dozen children of his own!"

I spoke with heat. . . . Tyeglev winced and flushed . . . flushed unevenly, in patches.

"Don't lecture me, if you please," he said dully. "I don't justify myself, however. I have ruined her life and now I must pay the penalty. . . ."

His head sank and he was silent. I found nothing to say, either.

## XI

So we sat for a quarter of an hour. He looked away—I looked at him—and I noticed that the hair stood up and curled above his fore-

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head in a peculiar way, which, so I have heard from an army doctor who had had a great many wounded pass through his hands, is always a symptom of intense overheating of the brain. . . . The thought struck me again that fate really had laid a heavy hand on this man and that his comrades were right in seeing something "fatal" in him. And yet inwardly I blamed him. "A working-class girl!" I thought, "a fine sort of aristocrat you are yourself!"

"Perhaps you blame me, Ridel," Tyeglev began suddenly, as though guessing what I was thinking. "I am very . . . unhappy myself. But what to do? What to do?"

He leaned his chin on his hand and began biting the broad flat nails of his short, red fingers, hard as iron.

"What I think, Ilya Stepanitch, is that you ought first to make certain whether your suppositions are correct. . . . Perhaps your lady love is alive and well." ("Shall I tell him the real explanation of the taps?" flashed through my mind. "No—later.")

"She has not written to me since we have been in camp," observed Tyeglev.

"That proves nothing, Ilya Stepanitch."

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

Tyeglev waved me off. "No! she is certainly not in this world. She called me."

He suddenly turned to the window. "Someone is knocking again!"

I could not help laughing. "No, excuse me, Ilya Stepanitch! This time it is your nerves. You see, it is getting light. In ten minutes the sun will be up—it is past three o'clock—and ghosts have no power in the day."

Tyeglev cast a gloomy glance at me and muttering through his teeth "good-bye," lay down on the bench and turned his back on me.

I lay down, too, and before I fell asleep I remember I wondered why Tyeglev was always hinting at . . . suicide. What nonsense! What humbug! Of his own free will he had refused to marry her, had cast her off . . . and now he wanted to kill himself! There was no sense in it! He could not resist posing!

With these thoughts I fell into a sound sleep and when I opened my eyes the sun was already high in the sky—and Tyeglev was not in the hut.

He had, so his servant said, gone to the town.

## A STUDY

### XII

I spent a very dull and wearisome day. Tyeglev did not return to dinner nor to supper; I did not expect my brother. Towards evening a thick fog came on again, thicker even than the day before. I went to bed rather early. I was awakened by a knocking under the window.

It was *my* turn to be startled!

The knock was repeated and so insistently distinct that one could have no doubt of its reality. I got up, opened the window and saw Tyeglev. Wrapped in his great-coat, with his cap pulled over his eyes, he stood motionless.

"Ilya Stepanitch!" I cried, "is that you? I gave up expecting you. Come in. Is the door locked?"

Tyeglev shook his head. "I do not intend to come in," he pronounced in a hollow tone. "I only want to ask you to give this letter to the commanding officer to-morrow."

He gave me a big envelope sealed with five seals. I was astonished—however, I took the

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

envelope mechanically. Tyeglev at once walked away into the middle of the road.

"Stop! stop!" I began. "Where are you going? Have you only just come? And what is the letter?"

"Do you promise to deliver it?" said Tyeglev, and moved away a few steps further. The fog blurred the outlines of his figure. "Do you promise?"

"I promise . . . but first——"

Tyeglev moved still further away and became a long dark blur. "Good-bye," I heard his voice. "Farewell, Ridel, don't remember evil against me. . . . And don't forget Semyon. . . ."

And the blur itself vanished.

This was too much. "Oh, the damned *poseur*," I thought. "You must always be straining after effect!" I felt uneasy, however; an involuntary fear clutched at my heart. I flung on my great-coat and ran out into the road.

## XIII

Yes; but where was I to go? The fog enveloped me on all sides. For five or six steps

## A STUDY

all round it was a little transparent—but further away it stood up like a wall, thick and white like cotton wool. I turned to the right along the village street; our house was the last but one in the village and beyond it came waste land overgrown here and there with bushes; beyond the waste land, a quarter of a mile from the village, there was a birch copse through which flowed the same little stream that lower down encircled our village. The moon stood, a pale blur in the sky—but its light was not, as on the evening before, strong enough to penetrate the smoky density of the fog and hung, a broad opaque canopy, overhead. I made my way out on to the open ground and listened. . . . Not a sound from any direction, except the calling of the marsh birds.

“Tyeglev!” I cried. “Ilya Stepanitch!! Tyeglev!!”

My voice died away near me without an answer; it seemed as though the fog would not let it go further. “Tyeglev!” I repeated.

No one answered.

I went forward at random. Twice I struck against a fence, once I nearly fell into a ditch, and almost stumbled against a peasant's horse

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

lying on the ground. "Tyeglev! Tyeglev!" I cried.

All at once, almost behind me, I heard a low voice, "Well, here I am. What do you want of me?"

I turned round quickly.

Before me stood Tyeglev with his hands hanging at his sides and with no cap on his head. His face was pale; but his eyes looked animated and bigger than usual. His breathing came in deep, prolonged gasps through his parted lips.

"Thank God!" I cried in an outburst of joy, and I gripped him by both hands. "Thank God! I was beginning to despair of finding you. Aren't you ashamed of frightening me like this? Upon my word, Ilya Stepanitch!"

"What do you want of me?" repeated Tyeglev.

"I want . . . I want you, in the first place, to come back home with me. And secondly, I want, I insist, I insist as a friend, that you explain to me at once the meaning of your actions—and of this letter to the colonel. Can something unexpected have happened to you in Petersburg?"

## A STUDY

"I found in Petersburg exactly what I expected," answered Tyeglev, without moving from the spot.

"That is . . . you mean to say . . . your friend . . . this Masha. . . ."

"She has taken her life," Tyeglev answered hurriedly and as it were angrily. "She was buried the day before yesterday. She did not even leave a note for me. She poisoned herself."

Tyeglev hurriedly uttered these terrible words and still stood motionless as a stone.

I clasped my hands. "Is it possible? How dreadful! Your presentiment has come true. . . . That is awful!"

I stopped in confusion. Slowly and with a sort of triumph Tyeglev folded his arms.

"But why are we standing here?" I began. "Let us go home."

"Let us," said Tyeglev. "But how can we find the way in this fog?"

"There is a light in our windows, and we will make for it. Come along."

"You go ahead," answered Tyeglev. "I will follow you." We set off. We walked for five



## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

minutes and our beacon light still did not appear; at last it gleamed before us in two red points. Tyeglev stepped evenly behind me. I was desperately anxious to get home as quickly as possible and to learn from him all the details of his unhappy expedition to Petersburg. Before we reached the hut, impressed by what he had said, I confessed to him in an access of remorse and a sort of superstitious fear, that the mysterious knocking of the previous evening had been my doing . . . and what a tragic turn my jest had taken!

Tyeglev confined himself to observing that I had nothing to do with it—that something else had guided my hand—and this only showed how little I knew him. His voice, strangely calm and even, sounded close to my ear. “But you do not know me,” he added. “I saw you smile yesterday when I spoke of the strength of my will. You will come to know me—and you will remember my words.”

The first hut of the village sprang out of the fog before us like some dark monster . . . then the second, our hut, emerged—and my setter dog began barking, probably scenting me.

## A STUDY

I knocked at the window. "Semyon!" I shouted to Tyeglev's servant, "hey, Semyon! Make haste and open the gate for us."

The gate creaked and opened; Semyon crossed the threshold.

"Ilya Stepanitch, come in," I said, and I looked round. But no Ilya Stepanitch was with me. Tyeglev had vanished as though he had sunk into the earth.

I went into the hut feeling dazed.

## XIV

Vexation with Tyeglev and with myself succeeded the amazement with which I was overcome at first.

"Your master is mad!" I blurted out to Semyon, "raving mad! He galloped off to Petersburg, then came back and is running about all over the place! I did get hold of him and brought him right up to the gate—and here he has given me the slip again! To go out of doors on a night like this! He has chosen a nice time for a walk!"

"And why did I let go of his hand?" I reproached myself. Semyon looked at me in

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

silence, as though intending to say something—but after the fashion of servants in those days he simply shifted from one foot to the other and said nothing.

“What time did he set off for town?” I asked sternly.

“At six o’clock in the morning.”

“And how was he—did he seem anxious, depressed?” Semyon looked down. “Our master is a deep one,” he began. “Who can make him out? He told me to get out his new uniform when he was going out to town—and then he curled himself.”

“Curled himself?”

“Curled his hair. I got the curling tongs ready for him.”

That, I confess, I had not expected. “Do you know a young lady,” I asked Semyon, “a friend of Ilya Stepanitch’s. Her name is Masha.”

“To be sure I know Marya Anempodistovna! A nice young lady.”

“Is your master in love with this Marya . . . et cetera?”

## A STUDY

Semyon heaved a sigh. "That young lady is Ilya Stepanitch's undoing. For he is desperately in love with her—and can't bring himself to marry her—and sorry to give her up, too. It's all his honour's faintheartedness. He is very fond of her."

"What is she like then, pretty?" I inquired.

Semyon assumed a grave air. "She is the sort that the gentry like."

"And you?"

"She is not the right sort for us at all."

"How so?"

"Very thin in the body."

"If she died," I began, "do you think Ilya Stepanitch would not survive her?"

Semyon heaved a sigh again. "I can't venture to say that—there's no knowing with gentlemen . . . but our master is a deep one."

I took up from the table the big, rather thick letter that Tyeglev had given me and turned it over in my hands. . . . The address to "his honour the Commanding Officer of the Battery, Colonel So and So" (the name, patronymic, and surname) was clearly and distinctly writ-

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

ten. The word *urgent*, twice underlined, was written in the top left-hand corner of the envelope.

"Listen, Semyon," I began. "I feel uneasy about your master. I fancy he has some mischief in his mind. We must find him."

"Yes, sir," answered Semyon.

"It is true there is such a fog that one cannot see a couple of yards ahead; but all the same we must do our best. We will each take a lantern and light a candle in each window—in case of need."

"Yes, sir," repeated Semyon. He lighted the lanterns and the candles and we set off.

## XV

I can't describe how we wandered and lost our way! The lanterns were of no help to us; they did not in the least dissipate the white, almost luminous mist which surrounded us. Several times Semyon and I lost each other, in spite of the fact that we kept calling to each other and hallooing and at frequent intervals shouted—I: "Tyeglev! Ilya Stepanitch!" and Semyon: "Mr. Tyeglev! Your honour!" The

## A STUDY

fog so bewildered us that we wandered about as though in a dream; soon we were both hoarse; the fog penetrated right into one's chest. We succeeded somehow by help of the candles in the windows in reaching the hut again. Our combined action had been of no use—we merely handicapped each other—and so we made up our minds not to trouble ourselves about getting separated but to go each our own way. He went to the left, I to the right and I soon ceased to hear his voice. The fog seemed to have found its way into my brain and I wandered like one dazed, simply shouting from time to time, "Tyeglev! Tyeglev!"

"Here!" I heard suddenly in answer.

Holy saints, how relieved I was! How I rushed in the direction from which the voice came. . . . A human figure loomed dark before me. . . . I made for it. At last!

But instead of Tyeglev I saw another officer of the same battery, whose name was Tyelepnev.

"Was it you answered me?" I asked him.

"Was it you calling me?" he asked in his turn.

"No; I was calling Tyeglev."

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

"Tyeglev? Why, I met him a minute ago. What a fool of a night! One can't find the way home."

"You saw Tyeglev? Which way did he go?"

"That way, I fancy," said the officer, waving his hand in the air. "But one can't be sure of anything now. Do you know, for instance, where the village is? The only hope is the dogs barking. It is a fool of a night! Let me light a cigarette . . . it will seem like a light on the way."

The officer was, so I fancied, a little exhilarated.

"Did Tyeglev say anything to you?" I asked.

"To be sure he did! I said to him, 'good evening, brother,' and he said, 'good-bye.' 'How good-bye? Why good-bye.' 'I mean to shoot myself directly with a pistol.' He is a queer fish!"

My heart stood still. "You say he told you . . ."

"He is a queer fish!" repeated the officer, and sauntered off.

I hardly had time to recover from what the officer had told me, when my own name, shouted several times as it seemed with ef-

## A STUDY

fort, caught my ear. I recognised Semyon's voice.

I called back . . . he came to me.

### XVI

"Well?" I asked him. "Have you found Ilya Stepanitch?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"Here, not far away."

"How . . . have you found him? Is he alive?"

"To be sure. I have been talking to him." (A load was lifted from my heart.) "His honour was sitting in his great-coat under a birch tree . . . and he was all right. I put it to him, 'Won't you come home, Ilya Stepanitch; Alexandr Vassilitch is very much worried about you.' And he said to me, 'What does he want to worry for! I want to be in the fresh air. My head aches. Go home,' he said, 'and I will come later.'"

"And you left him?" I cried, clasping my hands.

"What else could I do? He told me to go . . . how could I stay?"



## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

All my fears came back to me at once.

"Take me to him this minute—do you hear? This minute! O Semyon, Semyon, I did not expect this of you! You say he is not far off?"

"He is quite close, here, where the copse begins—he is sitting there. It is not more than five yards from the river bank. I found him as I came alongside the river."

"Well, take me to him, take me to him."

Semyon set off ahead of me. "This way, sir. . . . We have only to get down to the river and it is close there."

But instead of getting down to the river we got into a hollow and found ourselves before an empty shed.

"Hey, stop!" Semyon cried suddenly. "I must have come too far to the right. . . . We must go that way, more to the left. . . ."

We turned to the left—and found ourselves among such high, rank weeds that we could scarcely get out. . . . I could not remember such a tangled growth of weeds anywhere near our village. And then all at once a marsh was squelching under our feet, and we saw little round moss-covered hillocks which I had

## A STUDY

never noticed before either. . . . We turned back—a small hill was sharply before us and on the top of it stood a shanty—and in it someone was snoring. Semyon and I shouted several times into the shanty; something stirred at the further end of it, the straw rustled—and a hoarse voice shouted, “I am on guard.”

We turned back again . . . fields and fields, endless fields. . . . I felt ready to cry. . . . I remembered the words of the fool in *King Lear*: “This night will turn us all to fools or madmen.”

“Where are we to go?” I said in despair to Semyon.

“The devil must have led us astray, sir,” answered the distracted servant. “It’s not natural . . . there’s mischief at the bottom of it!”

I would have checked him but at that instant my ear caught a sound, distinct but not loud, that engrossed my whole attention. There was a faint “pop” as though someone had drawn a stiff cork from a narrow bottle-neck. The sound came from somewhere not far off. Why the sound seemed to me strange and peculiar I could not say, but at once I went towards it.

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

Semyon followed me. Within a few minutes something tall and broad loomed in the fog.

"The copse! here is the copse!" Semyon cried, delighted. "Yes, here . . . and there is the master sitting under the birch-tree. . . . There he is, sitting where I left him. That's he, surely enough!"

I looked intently. A man really was sitting with his back towards us, awkwardly huddled up under the birch-tree. I hurriedly approached and recognised Tyeglev's great-coat, recognised his figure, his head bowed on his breast. "Tyeglev!" I cried . . . but he did not answer.

"Tyeglev!" I repeated, and laid my hand on his shoulder. Then he suddenly lurched forward, quickly and obediently, as though he were waiting for my touch, and fell onto the grass. Semyon and I raised him at once and turned him face upwards. It was not pale, but was lifeless and motionless; his clenched teeth gleamed white—and his eyes, motionless, too, and wide open, kept their habitual, drowsy and "different" look.

"Good God!" Semyon said suddenly and

## A STUDY

showed me his hand stained crimson with blood. . . . The blood was coming from under Tyeglev's great-coat, from the left side of his chest.

He had shot himself from a small, single-barreled pistol which was lying beside him. The faint pop I had heard was the sound made by the fatal shot.

## XVII

Tyeglev's suicide did not surprise his comrades very much. I have told you already that, according to their ideas, as a "fatal" man he was bound to do something extraordinary, though perhaps they had not expected that from him. In the letter to the colonel he asked him, in the first place, to have the name of Ilya Tyeglev removed from the list of officers, as he had died by his own act, adding that in his cash-box there would be found more than sufficient money to pay his debts,—and, secondly, to forward to the important personage at that time commanding the whole corps of guards, an unsealed letter which was in the same envelope. This second letter, of course, we all read; some

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

of us took a copy of it. Tyeglev had evidently taken pains over the composition of this letter.

"You know, Your Excellency" (so I remember the letter began), "you are so stern and severe over the slightest negligence in uniform when a pale, trembling officer presents himself before you; and here am I now going to meet our universal, righteous, incorruptible Judge, the Supreme Being, the Being of infinitely greater consequence even than Your Excellency, and I am going to meet him in undress, in my great-coat, and even without a cravat round my neck."

Oh, what a painful and unpleasant impression that phrase made upon me, with every word, every letter of it, carefully written in the dead man's childish handwriting! Was it worth while, I asked myself, to invent such rubbish at such a moment? But Tyeglev had evidently been pleased with the phrase: he had made use in it of the accumulation of epithets and amplifications *à la* Marlinsky, at that time in fashion. Further on he had alluded to destiny, to persecution, to his vocation which had remained un-

## A STUDY

fulfilled, to a mystery which he would bear with him to the grave, to people who had not cared to understand him; he had even quoted lines from some poet who had said of the crowd that it wore life "like a dog-collar" and clung to vice "like a burdock"—and it was not free from mistakes in spelling. To tell the truth, this last letter of poor Tyeglev was somewhat vulgar; and I can fancy the contemptuous surprise of the great personage to whom it was addressed—I can imagine the tone in which he would pronounce "a worthless officer! ill weeds are cleared out of the field!"

Only at the very end of the letter there was a sincere note from Tyeglev's heart. "Ah, Your Excellency," he concluded his epistle, "I am an orphan, I had no one to love me as a child—and all held aloof from me . . . and I myself destroyed the only heart that gave itself to me!"

Semyon found in the pocket of Tyeglev's great-coat a little album from which his master was never separated. But almost all the pages had been torn out; only one was left on which there was the following calculation;

# KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

Napoleon was born  
on August 15th, 1769.

1769

15

8 \*

---

Total 1792

\* August—the 8th month  
of the year.

1

7

9

2

---

Total 19!

Ilya Tyeglev was born  
on January 7th, 1811.

1811

7

1 ‡

---

Total 1819

‡ January—the 1st month  
of the year.

1

8

1

9

---

Total 19!

Napoleon died on May  
5th, 1825.

1825

5

5 \*

Total 1835

\* May—the 5th month  
of the year.

Ilya Tyeglev died on  
April 21st, 1834.

1834

21

7 ‡

Total 1862

‡ July—the 7th month  
of the year.

## A STUDY

1	1
8	8
3	6
5	2
—	—
Total 17!	Total 17!

Poor fellow! Was not this perhaps why he became an artillery officer?

As a suicide he was buried outside the cemetery—and he was immediately forgotten.

### XVIII

The day after Tyeglev's burial (I was still in the village waiting for my brother) Semyon came into the hut and announced that Ilya wanted to see me.

"What Ilya?" I asked.

"Our pedlar."

I told Semyon to call him.

He made his appearance. He expressed some regret at the death of the lieutenant; wondered what could have possessed him. . . .

"Was he in debt to you?" I asked.

"No, sir. He always paid punctually for everything he had. But I tell you what," here



## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

the pedlar grinned, "you have got something of mine."

"What is it?"

"Why, that," he pointed to the brass comb lying on the little toilet table. "A thing of little value," the fellow went on, "but as it was a present . . ."

All at once I raised my head. Something dawned upon me.

"Your name is Ilya?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was it you, then, I saw under the willow tree the other night?"

The pedlar winked, and grinned more broadly than ever.

"Yes, sir."

"And it was *your* name that was called?"

"Yes, sir," the pedlar repeated with playful modesty. "There is a young girl here," he went on in a high falsetto, "who, owing to the great strictness of her parents——"

"Very good, very good," I interrupted him, handed him the comb and dismissed him.

"So that was the "Ilyusha," I thought, and I sank into philosophic reflections which I will

## A STUDY

not, however, intrude upon you as I don't want to prevent anyone from believing in fate, predestination and such like.

When I was back in Petersburg I made inquiries about Masha. I even discovered the doctor who had treated her. To my amazement I heard from him that she had died not through poisoning but of cholera! I told him what I had heard from Tyeglev.

"Eh! Eh!" cried the doctor all at once. "Is that Tyeglev an artillery officer, a man of middle height and with a stoop, speaks with a lisp?"

"Yes."

"Well, I thought so. That gentleman came to me—I had never seen him before—and began insisting that the girl had poisoned herself. 'It was cholera,' I told him. 'Poison,' he said. 'It was cholera, I tell you,' I said. 'No, it was poison,' he declared. I saw that the fellow was a sort of lunatic, with a broad base to his head—a sign of obstinacy, he would not give over easily. . . . Well, it doesn't matter, I thought, the patient is dead. . . . 'Very well,' I said, 'she poisoned herself if you prefer it.' He thanked me, even shook hands with me—and departed."

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

I told the doctor how the officer had shot himself the same day.

The doctor did not turn a hair—and only observed that there were all sorts of queer fellows in the world.

“There are indeed,” I assented.

✓ Yes, someone has said truly of suicides: until they carry out their design, no one believes them; and when they do, no one regrets them.

Baden, 1870.

## THE INN

ON the high road to B., at an equal distance from the two towns through which it runs, there stood not long ago a roomy inn, very well known to the drivers of troikas, peasants with trains of waggons, merchants, clerks, pedlars and the numerous travellers of all sorts who journey upon our roads at all times of the year. Everyone used to call at the inn; only perhaps a landowner's coach, drawn by six home-bred horses, would roll majestically by, which did not prevent either the coachman or the groom on the footboard from looking with peculiar feeling and attention at the little porch so familiar to them; or some poor devil in a wretched little cart and with three five-kopeck pieces in the bag in his bosom would urge on his weary nag when he reached the prosperous inn, and would hasten on to some night's lodging in the hamlets that lie by the high road in a

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

peasant's hut, where he would find nothing but bread and hay, but, on the other hand, would not have to pay an extra kopeck. Apart from its favourable situation, the inn with which our story deals had many attractions: excellent water in two deep wells with creaking wheels and iron buckets on a chain; a spacious yard with a tiled roof on posts; abundant stores of oats in the cellar; a warm outer room with a very huge Russian stove with long horizontal flues attached that looked like titanic shoulders, and lastly two fairly clean rooms with the walls covered with reddish lilac paper somewhat frayed at the lower edge with a painted wooden sofa, chairs to match and two pots of geraniums in the windows, which were, however, never cleaned—and were dingy with the dust of years. The inn had other advantages: the blacksmith's was close by, the mill was just at hand; and, lastly, one could get a good meal in it, thanks to the cook, a fat and red-faced peasant woman, who prepared rich and appetizing dishes and dealt out provisions without stint; the nearest tavern was reckoned not half a mile away; the host kept snuff which though mixed with wood-

## THE INN

ash, was extremely pungent and pleasantly irritated the nose; in fact there were many reasons why visitors of all sorts were never lacking in that inn. It was liked by those who used it—and that is the chief thing; without which nothing, of course, would succeed and it was liked principally as it was said in the district, because the host himself was very fortunate and successful in all his undertakings, though he did not much deserve his good fortune; but it seems if a man is lucky, he is lucky.

The innkeeper was a man of the working class called Naum Ivanov. He was a man of middle height with broad, stooping shoulders; he had a big round head and curly hair already grey, though he did not look more than forty; a full and fresh face, a low but white and smooth forehead and little bright blue eyes, out of which he looked in a very queer way from under his brows and yet with an insolent expression, a combination not often met with. He always held his head down and seemed to turn it with difficulty, perhaps because his neck was very short. He walked at a trot and did not swing his arms, but slowly moved them

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

with his fists clenched as he walked. When he smiled, and he smiled often without laughing, as it were smiling to himself, his thick lips parted unpleasantly and displayed a row of close-set, brilliant teeth. He spoke jerkily and with a surly note in his voice. He shaved his beard, but dressed in Russian style. His costume consisted of a long, always threadbare, full coat, full breeches and shoes on his bare feet. He was often away from home on business and he had a great deal of business—he was a horse-dealer, he rented land, had a market garden, bought up orchards and traded in various ways—but his absences never lasted long; like a kite, to which he had considerable resemblance, especially in the expression of his eyes, he used to return to his nest. He knew how to keep that nest in order. He was everywhere, he listened to everything and gave orders, served out stores, sent things out and made up his accounts himself, and never knocked off a farthing from anyone's account, but never asked more than his due.

The visitors did not talk to him, and, indeed, he did not care to waste words. "I want your

## THE INN

money and you want my victuals," he used to say, as it were, jerking out each word! "We have not met for a christening; the traveller has eaten, has fed his beasts, no need to sit on. If he is tired, let him sleep without chattering." The labourers he kept were healthy grown-up men, but docile and well broken in; they were very much afraid of him. He never touched intoxicating liquor and he used to give his men ten kopecks for vodka on the great holidays; they did not dare to drink on other days. People like Naum quickly get rich . . . but to the magnificent position in which he found himself—and he was believed to be worth forty or fifty thousand roubles—Naum Ivanov had not arrived by the strait path. . . .

The inn had existed on the same spot on the high road twenty years before the time from which we date the beginning of our story. It is true that it had not then the dark red shingle roof which made Naum Ivanov's inn look like a gentleman's house; it was inferior in construction and had thatched roofs in the courtyard, and a humble fence instead of a wall of logs; nor had it been distinguished by



## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

the triangular Greek pediment on carved posts ; but all the same it had been a capital inn—roomy, solid and warm—and travellers were glad to frequent it. The innkeeper at that time was not Naum Ivanov, but a certain Akim Semyonitch, a serf belonging to a neighbouring lady, Lizaveta Prohorovna Kuntse, the widow of a staff officer. This Akim was a shrewd trading peasant who, having left home in his youth with two wretched nags to work as a carrier, had returned a year later with three decent horses and had spent almost all the rest of his life on the high roads ; he used to go to Kazan and Odessa, to Orenburg and to Warsaw and abroad to Leipsic and used in the end to travel with two teams, each of three stout, sturdy stallions, harnessed to two huge carts. Whether it was that he was sick of his life of homeless wandering, whether it was that he wanted to rear a family (his wife had died in one of his absences and what children she had borne him were dead also), anyway, he made up his mind at last to abandon his old calling and to open an inn. With the permission of his mistress, he settled on the high road, bought in

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her name about an acre and a half of land and built an inn upon it. The undertaking prospered. He had more than enough money to furnish and stock it. The experience he had gained in the course of his years of travelling from one end of Russia to another was of great advantage to him; he knew how to please his visitors, especially his former mates, the drivers of troikas, many of whom he knew personally and whose good-will is particularly valued by innkeepers, as they need so much food for themselves and their powerful beasts. Akim's inn became celebrated for hundreds of miles round. People were even readier to stay with him than with his successor, Naum, though Akim could not be compared with Naum as a manager. Under Akim everything was in the old-fashioned style, snug, but not over clean; and his oats were apt to be light, or musty; the cooking, too, was somewhat indifferent: dishes were sometimes put on the table which would better have been left in the oven and it was not that he was stingy with the provisions, but just that the cook had not looked after them. On the other hand, he was ready to knock

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off something from the price and did not refuse to trust a man's word for payment—he was a good man and a genial host. In talking, in entertaining, he was lavish, too; he would sometimes chatter away over the samovar till his listeners pricked up their ears, especially when he began telling them about Petersburg, about the Circassian steppes, or even about foreign parts; and he liked getting a little drunk with a good companion, but not disgracefully so, more for the sake of company, as his guests used to say of him. He was a great favourite with merchants and with all people of what is called the old school, who do not set off for a journey without tightening up their belts and never go into a room without making the sign of the cross, and never enter into conversation with a man without first wishing him good health. Even Akim's appearance disposed people in his favour: he was tall, rather thin, but graceful even at his advanced years; he had a long face, with fine-looking regular features, a high and open brow, a straight and delicate nose and a small mouth. His brown and prominent eyes positively shone

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with friendly gentleness, his soft, scanty hair curled in little rings about his neck; he had very little left on the top of his head. Akim's voice was very pleasant, though weak; in his youth he had been a good singer, but continual travelling in the open air in the winter had affected his chest. But he talked very smoothly and sweetly. When he laughed wrinkles like rays that were very charming came round his eyes:—such wrinkles are only to be seen in kind-hearted people. Akim's movements were for the most part deliberate and not without a certain confidence and dignified courtesy befitting a man of experience who had seen a great deal in his day.

In fact, Akim—or Akim Semyonitch as he was called even in his mistress's house, to which he often went and invariably on Sundays after mass—would have been excellent in all respects—if he had not had one weakness which has been the ruin of many men on earth, and was in the end the ruin of him, too—a weakness for the fair sex. Akim's susceptibility was extreme, his heart could never resist a woman's glance: he melted before it like the first snow

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of autumn in the sun . . . and dearly he had to pay for his excessive sensibility.

For the first year after he had set up on the high road Akim was so busy with building his yard, stocking the place, and all the business inseparable from moving into a new house that he had absolutely no time to think of women and if any sinful thought came into his mind he immediately drove it away by reading various devotional works for which he cherished a profound respect (he had learned to read when first he left home), singing the psalms in a low voice or some other pious occupation. Besides, he was then in his forty-sixth year and at that time of life every passion grows perceptibly calmer and cooler and the time for marrying was past. Akim himself began to think that, as he expressed it, this foolishness was over and done with . . . But evidently there is no escaping one's fate.

Akim's former mistress, Lizaveta Prohorovna Kuntse, the widow of an officer of German extraction, was herself a native of Mittau, where she had spent the first years of her childhood and where she had numerous poor relations,

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about whom she concerned herself very little, especially after a casual visit from one of her brothers, an infantry officer of the line. On the day after his arrival he had made a great disturbance and almost beaten the lady of the house, calling her "du lumpenmamselle." though only the evening before he had called her in broken Russian: "sister and benefactor." Lizaveta Prohorovna lived almost permanently on her pretty estate which had been won by the labours of her husband who had been an architect. She managed it herself and managed it very well. Lizaveta Prohorovna never let slip the slightest advantage; she turned everything into profit for herself; and this, as well as her extraordinary capacity for making a farthing do the work of a halfpenny, betrayed her German origin; in everything else she had become very Russian. She kept a considerable number of house serfs, especially many maids, who earned their salt, however: from morning to night their backs were bent over their work. She liked driving out in her carriage with grooms in livery on the foot-board. She liked listening to gossip and scan-

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dal and was a clever scandal-monger herself; she liked to lavish favours upon someone, then suddenly crush him with her displeasure, in fact, Lizaveta Prohorovna behaved exactly like a lady. Akim was in her good graces; he paid her punctually every year a very considerable sum in lieu of service; she talked graciously to him and even, in jest, invited him as a guest . . . but it was precisely in his mistress's house that trouble was in store for Akim.

Among Lizaveta Prohorovna's maidservants was an orphan girl of twenty called Dunyasha. She was good-looking, graceful and neat-handed; though her features were irregular, they were pleasing; her fresh complexion, her thick flaxen hair, her lively grey eyes, her little round nose, her rosy lips and above all her half-mocking, half-provocative expression—were all rather charming in their way. At the same time, in spite of her forlorn position, she was strict, almost haughty in her deportment. She came of a long line of house serfs. Her father, Arefy, had been a butler for thirty years, while her grandfather, Stepan had been valet to a prince and officer of the Guards long

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since dead. She dressed neatly and was vain over her hands, which were certainly very beautiful. Dunyasha made a show of great disdain for all her admirers; she listened to their compliments with a self-complacent little smile and if she answered them at all it was usually some exclamation such as: "Yes! Likely! As though I should! What next!" These exclamations were always on her lips. Dunyasha had spent about three years being trained in Moscow where she had picked up the peculiar airs and graces which distinguish maidservants who have been in Moscow or Petersburg. She was spoken of as a girl of self-respect (high praise on the lips of house serfs) who, though she had seen something of life, had not let herself down. She was rather clever with her needle, too, yet with all this Lizaveta Prohorovna was not very warmly disposed toward her, thanks to the headmaid, Kirillovna, a sly and intriguing woman, no longer young. Kirillovna exercised great influence over her mistress and very skilfully succeeded in getting rid of all rivals.

With this Dunyasha Akim must needs fall



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in love! And he fell in love as he had never fallen in love before. He saw her first at church: she had only just come back from Moscow. . . . Afterwards, he met her several times in his mistress's house; finally he spent a whole evening with her at the steward's, where he had been invited to tea in company with other highly respected persons. The house serfs did not disdain him, though he was not of their class and wore a beard; he was a man of education, could read and write and, what was more, had money; and he did not dress like a peasant but wore a long full coat of black cloth, high boots of calf leather and a kerchief on his neck. It is true that some of the house serfs did say among themselves that: "One can see that he is not one of us," but to his face they almost flattered him. On that evening at the steward's Dunyasha made a complete conquest of Akim's susceptible heart, though she said not a single word in answer to his ingratiating speeches and only looked sideways at him from time to time as though wondering why that peasant was there. All that only added fuel to the flames. He went home, pondered and pondered

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and made up his mind to win her hand. . . . She had somehow "bewitched" him. But how can I describe the wrath and indignation of Dunyasha when five days later Kirillovna with a friendly air invited her into her room and told her that Akim (and evidently he knew how to set to work) that bearded peasant Akim, to sit by whose side she considered almost an indignity, was courting her.

Dunyasha first flushed crimson, then she gave a forced laugh, then she burst into tears; but Kirillovna made her attack so artfully, made the girl feel her own position in the house so clearly, so tactfully hinted at the presentable appearance, the wealth and blind devotion of Akim and finally mentioned so significantly the wishes of their mistress that Dunyasha went out of the room with a look of hesitation on her face and meeting Akim only gazed intently into his face and did not turn away. The indescribably lavish presents of the love-sick man dissipated her last doubts. Lizaveta Prohorovna, to whom Akim in his joy took a hundred peaches on a large silver dish, gave her consent to the marriage, and the marriage took place.

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Akim spared no expense—and the bride, who on the eve of her wedding at her farewell party to her girl friends sat looking a figure of misery, and who cried all the next morning while Kirillovna was dressing her for the wedding, was soon comforted. . . . Her mistress gave her her own shawl to wear in the church and Akim presented her the same day with one like it, almost superior.

And so Akim was married, and took his young bride home. . . . They began their life together. . . . Dunyasha turned out to be a poor housewife, a poor helpmate to her husband. She took no interest in anything, was melancholy and depressed unless some officer sitting by the big samovar noticed her and paid her compliments; she was often absent, sometimes in the town shopping, sometimes at the mistress's house, which was only three miles from the inn. There she felt at home, there she was surrounded by her own people; the girls envied her finery. Kirillovna regaled her with tea; Lizaveta Prohorovna herself talked to her. But even these visits did not pass without some bitter experiences for Dunyasha. . . .

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As an innkeeper's wife, for instance, she could not wear a hat and was obliged to tie up her head in a kerchief, "like a merchant's lady," said sly Kirillovna, "like a working woman," thought Dunyasha to herself.

More than once Akim recalled the words of his only relation, an uncle who had lived in solitude without a family for years: "Well, Akimushka, my lad," he had said, meeting him in the street, "I hear you are getting married."

"Why, yes, what of it?"

"Ech; Akim, Akim. You are above us peasants now, there's no denying that; but you are not on her level either."

"In what way not on her level?"

"Why, in that way, for instance," his uncle had answered, pointing to Akim's beard, which he had begun to clip in order to please his betrothed, though he had refused to shave it completely. . . . Akim looked down; while the old man turned away, wrapped his tattered sheepskin about him and walked away, shaking his head.

Yes, more than once Akim sank into thought, cleared his throat and sighed. . . . But his

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love for his pretty wife was no less; he was proud of her, especially when he compared her not merely with peasant women, or with his first wife, to whom he had been married at sixteen, but with other serf girls; "look what a fine bird we have caught," he thought to himself. . . . Her slightest caress gave him immense pleasure. "Maybe," he thought, "she will get used to it; maybe she will get into the way of it." Meanwhile her behaviour was irreproachable and no one could say anything against her.

Several years passed like this. Dunyasha really did end by growing used to her way of life. Akim's love for her and confidence in her only increased as he grew older; her girl friends, who had been married not to peasants, were suffering cruel hardships, either from poverty or from having fallen into bad hands. . . . Akim went on getting richer and richer. Everything succeeded with him—he was always lucky; only one thing was a grief: God had not given him children. Dunyasha was by now over five and twenty; everyone addressed her as Avdotya Arefyevna. She

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never became a real housewife, however—but she grew fond of her house, looked after the stores and superintended the woman who worked in the house. It is true that she did all this only after a fashion; she did not keep up a high standard of cleanliness and order; on the other hand, her portrait painted in oils and ordered by herself from a local artist, the son of the parish deacon, hung on the wall of the chief room beside that of Akim. She was depicted in a white dress with a yellow shawl with six strings of big pearls round her neck, long earrings, and a ring on every finger. The portrait was recognisable though the artist had painted her excessively stout and rosy—and had made her eyes not grey but black and even slightly squinting. . . . Akim's was a complete failure, the portrait had come out dark—*à la* Rembrandt—so that sometimes a visitor would go up to it, look at it and merely give an inarticulate murmur. Avdotya had taken to being rather careless in her dress; she would fling a big shawl over her shoulders, while the dress under it was put on anyhow: she was overcome by laziness, that sighing apathetic drowsy laziness.

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ness to which the Russian is only too liable, especially when his livelihood is secure. . . .

With all that, the fortunes of Akim and his wife prospered exceedingly; they lived in harmony and had the reputation of an exemplary pair. But just as a squirrel will wash its face at the very instant when the sportsman is aiming at it, man has no presentiment of his troubles, till all of a sudden the ground gives way under him like ice.

One autumn evening a merchant in the drapery line put up at Akim's inn. He was journeying by various cross-country roads from Moscow to Harkov with two loaded tilt carts; he was one of those travelling traders whose arrival is sometimes awaited with such impatience by country gentlemen and still more by their wives and daughters. This travelling merchant, an elderly man, had with him two companions, or, speaking more correctly, two workmen, one thin, pale and hunchbacked, the other a fine, handsome young fellow of twenty. They asked for supper, then sat down to tea; the merchant invited the innkeeper and his wife to take a cup with him, they did not refuse.

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A conversation quickly sprang up between the two old men (Akim was fifty-six) ; the merchant inquired about the gentry of the neighbourhood and no one could give him more useful information about them than Akim; the hunch-backed workman spent his time looking after the carts and finally went off to bed; it fell to Avdotya to talk to the other one. . . . She sat by him and said little, rather listening to what he told her, but it was evident that his talk pleased her; her face grew more animated, the colour came into her cheeks and she laughed readily and often. The young workman sat almost motionless with his curly head bent over the table; he spoke quietly, without haste and without raising his voice; but his eyes, not large but saucily bright and blue, were rivetted on Avdotya; at first she turned away from them, then she, too, began looking him in the face. The young fellow's face was fresh and smooth as a Crimean apple; he often smiled and tapped with his white fingers on his chin covered with soft dark down. He spoke like a merchant, but very freely and with a sort of careless self-confidence and went on looking at her with



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the same intent, impudent stare. . . . All at once he moved a little closer to her and without the slightest change of countenance said to her: "Avdotya Arefyevna, there's no one like you in the world; I am ready to die for you."

Avdotya laughed aloud.

"What is it?" asked Akim.

"Why, he keeps saying such funny things," she said, without any particular embarrassment.

The old merchant grinned.

"Ha, ha, yes, my Naum is such a funny fellow, don't listen to him."

"Oh! Really! As though I should," she answered, and shook her head.

"Ha, ha, of course not," observed the old man. "But, however," he went on in a sing-song voice, "we will take our leave; we are thoroughly satisfied, it is time for bed, . . ." and he got up.

"We are well satisfied, too," Akim brought out and he got up, "for your entertainment, that is, but we wish you a good night. Avdotyushka, come along."

Avdotya got up as it were unwillingly. Naum, too, got up after her . . . the party

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broke up. The innkeeper and his wire went off to the little lobby partitioned off, which served them as a bedroom. Akim was snoring immediately. It was a long time before Avdotya could get to sleep. . . . At first she lay still, turning her face to the wall, then she began tossing from side to side on the hot feather bed, throwing off and pulling up the quilt alternately . . . then she sank into a light doze. Suddenly she heard from the yard a loud masculine voice: it was singing a song of which it was impossible to distinguish the words, prolonging each note, though not with a melancholy effect. Avdotya opened her eyes, propped herself on her elbows and listened. . . . The song went on. . . . It rang out musically in the autumn air.

Akim raised his head.

"Who's that singing?" he asked.

"I don't know," she answered.

"He sings well," he added, after a brief pause. "Very well. What a strong voice. I used to sing in my day," he went on. "And I sang well, too, but my voice has gone. That's a fine voice. It must be that young fellow

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singing, Naum is his name, isn't it?" And he turned over on the other side, gave a sigh and fell asleep again.

It was a long time before the voice was still . . . Avdotya listened and listened; all at once it seemed to break off, rang out boldly once more and slowly died away. . . . Avdotya crossed herself and laid her head on the pillow. . . . Half an hour passed. . . . She sat up and softly got out of bed.

"Where are you going, wife?" Akim asked in his sleep.

She stopped.

"To see to the little lamp," she said, "I can't get to sleep."

"You should say a prayer," Akim mumbled, falling asleep.

Avdotya went up to the lamp before the ikon, began trimming it and accidentally put it out; she went back and lay down. Everything was still.

Early next morning the merchant set off again on his journey with his companions. Avdotya was asleep. Akim went half a mile with them: he had to call at the mill. When

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he got home he found his wife dressed and not alone. Naum, the young man who had been there the night before, was with her. They were standing by the table in the window talking. When Avdotya saw Akim, she went out of the room without a word, and Naum said that he had come for his master's gloves which the latter, he said, had left behind on the bench; and he, too, went away.

We will now tell the reader what he has probably guessed already: Avdotya had fallen passionately in love with Naum. It is hard to say how it could have happened so quickly, especially as she had hitherto been irreproachable in her behaviour in spite of many opportunities and temptations to deceive her husband. Later on, when her intrigue with Naum became known, many people in the neighbourhood declared that he had on the very first evening put a magic potion that was a love spell in her tea (the efficacy of such spells is still firmly believed in among us), and that this could be clearly seen from the appearance of Avdotya who, so they said, soon after began to pine away and look depressed.

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However that may have been, Naum began to be frequently seen in Akim's yard. At first he came again with the same merchant and three months later arrived alone, with wares of his own; then the report spread that he had settled in one of the neighbouring district towns, and from that time forward not a week passed without his appearing on the high road with his strong, painted cart drawn by two sleek horses which he drove himself. There was no particular friendship between Akim and him, nor was there any hostility noticed between them; Akim did not take much notice of him and only thought of him as a sharp young fellow who was rapidly making his way in the world. He did not suspect Avdotya's real feelings and went on believing in her as before.

Two years passed like this.

One summer day it happened that Lizaveta Prohorovna — who had somehow suddenly grown yellow and wrinkled during those two years in spite of all sorts of unguents, rouge and powder—about two o'clock in the afternoon went out with her lap dog and her folding parasol for a stroll before dinner in her neat

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little German garden. With a faint rustle of her starched petticoats, she walked with tiny steps along the sandy path between two rows of erect, stiffly tied-up dahlias, when she was suddenly overtaken by our old acquaintance Kirillovna, who announced respectfully that a merchant desired to speak to her on important business. Kirillovna was still high in her mistress's favour (in reality it was she who managed Madame Kuntse's estate) and she had some time before obtained permission to wear a white cap, which gave still more acerbity to the sharp features of her swarthy face.

"A merchant?" said her mistress; "what does he want?"

"I don't know what he wants," answered Kirillovna in an insinuating voice, "only I think he wants to buy something from you."

Lizaveta Prohorovna went back into the drawing-room, sat down in her usual seat—an armchair with a canopy over it, upon which a climbing plant twined gracefully—and gave orders that the merchant should be summoned.

Naum appeared, bowed, and stood still by the door.

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"I hear that you want to buy something of me," said Lizaveta Prohorovna, and thought to herself, "What a handsome man this merchant is."

"Just so, madam."

"What is it?"

"Would you be willing to sell your inn?"

"What inn?"

"Why, the one on the high road not far from here."

"But that inn is not mine, it is Akim's."

"Not yours? Why, it stands on your land."

"Yes, the land is mine . . . bought in my name; but the inn is his."

"To be sure. But wouldn't you be willing to sell it to me?"

"How could I sell it to you?"

"Well, I would give you a good price for it."

Lizaveta Prohorovna was silent for a space.

"It is really very queer what you are saying," she said. "And what would you give?" she added. "I don't ask that for myself but for Akim."

"For all the buildings and the appurtenances,

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together with the land that goes with it, of course, I would give two thousand roubles."

"Two thousand roubles! That is not enough," replied Lizaveta Prohorovna.

"It's a good price."

"But have you spoken to Akim?"

"What should I speak to him for? The inn is yours, so here I am talking to you about it."

"But I have told you. . . . It really is astonishing that you don't understand me."

"Not understand, madam? But I do understand."

Lizaveta Prohorovna looked at Naum and Naum looked at Lizaveta Prohorovna.

"Well, then," he began, "what do you propose?"

"I propose . . ." Lizaveta Prohorovna moved in her chair. "In the first place I tell you that two thousand is too little and in the second . . ."

"I'll add another hundred, then."

Lizaveta Prohorovna got up.

"I see that you are talking quite off the point. I have told you already that I cannot



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sell that inn—am not going to sell it. I cannot . . . that is, I will not.”

Naum smiled and said nothing for a space.

“Well, as you please, madam,” he said, shrugging his shoulders. “I beg to take leave.” He bowed and took hold of the door handle.

Lizaveta Prohorovna turned round to him.

“You need not go away yet, however,” she said, with hardly perceptible agitation. She rang the bell and Kirillovna came in from the study. “Kirillovna, tell them to give this gentleman some tea. I will see you again,” she added, with a slight inclination of her head.

Naum bowed again and went out with Kirillovna. Lizaveta Prohorovna walked up and down the room once or twice and rang the bell again. This time a page appeared. She told him to fetch Kirillovna. A few moments later Kirillovna came in with a faint creak of her new goatskin shoes.

“Have you heard,” Lizaveta Prohorovna began with a forced laugh, “what this merchant has been proposing to me? He is a queer fellow, really!”

“No, I haven’t heard. What is it, madam?”

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and Kirillovna faintly screwed up her black Kalmuck eyes.

"He wants to buy Akim's inn."

"Well, why not?"

"But how could he? What about Akim? I gave it to Akim."

"Upon my word, madam, what are you saying? Isn't the inn yours? Don't we all belong to you? And isn't all our property yours, our mistress's?"

"Good gracious, Kirillovna, what are you saying?" Lizaveta Prohorovna pulled out a batiste handkerchief and nervously blew her nose. "Akim bought the inn with his own money."

"His own money? But where did he get the money? Wasn't it through your kindness? He has had the use of the land all this time as it is. It was all through your gracious permission. And do you suppose, madam, that he would have no money left? Why, he is richer than you are, upon my word, he is!"

"That's all true, of course, but still I can't do it. . . . How could I sell the inn?"

"And why not sell it," Kirillovna went on,

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"since a purchaser has luckily turned up? May I ask, madam, how much he offers you?"

"More than two thousand roubles," said Lizaveta Prohorovna softly.

"He will give more, madam, if he offers two thousand straight off. And you will arrange things with Akim afterwards; take a little off his yearly duty or something. He will be thankful, too."

"Of course, I must remit part of his duty. But no, Kirillovna, how can I sell it?" and Lizaveta Prohorovna walked up and down the room. "No, that's out of the question, that won't do . . . no, please don't speak of it again . . . or I shall be angry."

But in spite of her agitated mistress's warning, Kirillovna did continue speaking of it and half an hour later she went back to Naum, whom she had left in the butler's pantry at the samovar.

"What have you to tell me, good madam?" said Naum, jauntily turning his tea-cup wrong side upwards in the saucer.

"What I have to tell you is that you are to go in to the mistress; she wants you."

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"Certainly," said Naum, and he got up and followed Kirillovna into the drawing-room.

The door closed behind them. . . . When the door opened again and Naum walked out backwards, bowing, the matter was settled: Akim's inn belonged to him. He had bought it for 2800 paper roubles. It was arranged that the legal formalities should take place as quickly as possible and that till then the matter should not be made public. Lizaveta Prohorovna received a deposit of a hundred roubles and two hundred went to Kirillovna for her assistance. "It has not cost me much," thought Naum as he got into his coat, "it was a lucky chance."

While the transaction we have described was going forward in the mistress's house, Akim was sitting at home alone on the bench by the window, stroking his beard with a discontented expression. We have said already that he did not suspect his wife's feeling for Naum, although kind friends had more than once hinted to him that it was time he opened his eyes; it is true that he had noticed himself that of late his wife had become rather difficult, but we all know that the female sex is capricious and

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changeable. Even when it really did strike him that things were not going well in his house, he merely dismissed the thought with a wave of his hand; he did not like the idea of a squabble; his good nature had not lessened with years and indolence was asserting itself, too. But on that day he was very much out of humour; the day before he had overheard quite by chance in the street a conversation between their servant and a neighbouring peasant woman.

The peasant woman asked the servant why she had not come to see her on the holiday the day before. "I was expecting you," she said.

"I did set off," replied the servant, "but as ill-luck would have it, I ran into the mistress . botheration take her."

"Ran into her?" repeated the peasant woman in a sing-song voice and she leaned her cheek on her hand. "And where did you run into her, my good girl?"

"Beyond the priest's hemp-patch. She must have gone to the hemp-patch to meet her Naum, but I could not see them in the dusk, owing to the moon, maybe, I don't know; I simply dashed into them."

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"Dashed into them?" the other woman repeated. "Well, and was she standing with him, my good girl?"

"Yes, she was. He was standing there and so was she. She saw me and said, 'Where are you running to? Go home.' So I went home."

"You went home?" The peasant woman was silent. "Well, good-bye, Fetinyushka," she brought out at last, and trudged off.

This conversation had an unpleasant effect on Akim. His love for Avdotya had cooled, but still he did not like what the servant had said. And she had told the truth: Avdotya really had gone out that evening to meet Naum, who had been waiting for her in the patch of dense shade thrown on the road by the high motionless hemp. The dew bathed every stalk of it from top to bottom; the strong, almost overpowering fragrance hung all about it. A huge crimson moon had just risen in the dingy, blackish mist. Naum heard the hurried footsteps of Avdotya a long way off and went to meet her. She came up to him, pale with running; the moon lighted up her face.

"Well, have you brought it?" he asked.

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"Brought it—yes, I have," she answered in an uncertain voice. "But, Naum Ivanitch——"

"Give it me, since you have brought it," he interrupted her, and held out his hand.

She took a parcel from under her shawl. Naum took it at once and thrust it in his bosom.

"Naum Ivanitch," Avdotya said slowly, keeping her eyes fixed on him, "oh, Naum Ivanitch, you will bring my soul to ruin."

It was at that instant that the servant came up to them.

And so Akim was sitting on the bench discontentedly stroking his beard. Avdotya kept coming into the room and going out again. He simply followed her with his eyes. At last she came into the room and after taking a jerkin from the lobby was just crossing the threshold, when he could not restrain himself and said, as though speaking to himself:

"I wonder," he began, "why it is women are always in a fuss? It's no good expecting them to sit still. That's not in their line. But running out morning or evening, that's what they like. Yes."

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Avdotya listened to her husband's words without changing her position; only at the word "evening," she moved her head slightly and seemed to ponder.

"Once you begin talking, Semyonitch," she commented at last with vexation, "there is no stopping you."

And with a wave of her hand she went away and slammed the door. Avdotya certainly did not appreciate Akim's eloquence and often in the evenings when he indulged in conversation with travellers or fell to telling stories she stealthily yawned or went out of the room. Akim looked at the closed door. "Once you begin talking," he repeated in an undertone. . . . "The fact is, I have not talked enough to you. And who is it? A peasant like any one of us, and what's more. . . ." And he got up, thought a little and tapped the back of his head with his fist.

Several days passed in a rather strange way. Akim kept looking at his wife as though he were preparing to say something to her, and she, for her part, looked at him suspiciously; meanwhile, they both preserved a strained



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silence. This silence, however, was broken from time to time by some peevish remark from Akim in regard to some oversight in the house-keeping or in regard to women in general. For the most part Avdotya did not answer one word. But in spite of Akim's good-natured weakness, it certainly would have come to a decisive explanation between him and Avdotya, if it had not been for an event which rendered any explanation useless.

One morning Akim and wife were just beginning lunch (owing to the summer work in the fields there were no travellers at the inn) when suddenly a cart rattled briskly along the road and pulled up sharply at the front door. Akim peeped out of window, frowned and looked down: Naum got deliberately out of the cart. Avdotya had not seen him, but when she heard his voice in the entry the spoon trembled in her hand. He told the labourers to put up the horse in the yard. At last the door opened and he walked into the room.

"Good-day," he said, and took off his cap.

"Good-day," Akim repeated through his teeth. "Where has God brought you from?"

"I was in the neighbourhood," replied Naum,

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and he sat down on the bench. "I have come from your lady."

"From the lady," said Akim, not getting up from his seat. "On business, eh?"

"Yes, on business. My respects to you, Avdotya Arefyevona."

"Good morning, Naum Ivanitch," she answered. All were silent.

"What have you got, broth, is it?" began Naum.

"Yes, broth," replied Akim and all at once he turned pale, "but not for you."

Naum glanced at Akim with surprise.

"Not for me?"

"Not for you, and that's all about it." Akim's eyes glittered and he brought his fist on the table. "There is nothing in my house for you, do you hear?"

"What's this, Semyonitch, what is the matter with you?"

"There's nothing the matter with me, but I am sick of you, Naum Ivanitch, that's what it is." The old man got up, trembling all over. "You poke yourself in here too often, I tell you."

Naum, too, got up.

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"You've gone clean off your head, old man," he said with a jeer. "Avdotya Arefyevna, what's wrong with him?"

"I tell you," shouted Akim in a cracked voice, "go away, do you hear? . . . You have nothing to do with Avdotya Arefyevna . . . I tell you, do you hear, get out!"

"What's that you are saying to me?" Naum asked significantly.

"Go out of the house, that's what I am telling to you. Here's God and here's the door . . . do you understand? Or there will be trouble."

Naum took a step forward.

"Good gracious, don't fight, my dears," faltered Avdotya, who till then had sat motionless at the table.

Naum glanced at her.

"Don't be uneasy, Avdotya Arefyevna, why should we fight? Fie, brother, what a hulla-baloo you are making!" he went on, addressing Akim. "Yes, really. You are a hasty one! Has anyone ever heard of turning anyone out of his house, especially the owner of it?" Naum added with slow deliberateness.

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"Out of his house?" muttered Akim. "What owner?"

"Me, if you like."

And Naum screwed up his eyes and showed his white teeth in a grin.

"You? Why, it's my house, isn't it?"

"What a slow-witted fellow you are! I tell you it's mine."

Akim gazed at him open-eyed.

"What crazy stuff is it you are talking? One would think you had gone silly," he said at last. "How the devil can it be yours?"

"What's the good of talking to you?" cried Naum impatiently. "Do you see this bit of paper?" he went on, pulling out of his pocket a sheet of stamped paper, folded in four, "do you see? This is the deed of sale, do you understand, the deed of sale of your land and your house; I have bought them from the lady, from Lizaveta Prohorovna; the deed was drawn up at the town yesterday; so I am master here, not you. Pack your belongings to-day," he added, putting the document back in his pocket, "and don't let me see a sign of you here to-morrow, do you hear?"

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Akim stood as though struck by a thunderbolt.

"Robber," he moaned at last, "robber. . . . Heigh, Fedka, Mitka, wife, wife, seize him, seize him—hold him."

He lost his head completely.

"Mind now, old man," said Naum menacingly, "mind what you are about, don't play the fool. . . ."

"Beat him, wife, beat him!" Akim kept repeating in a tearful voice, trying helplessly and in vain to get up. "Murderer, robber. . . . She is not enough for you, you want to take my house, too, and everything. . . . But no, stop a bit . . . that can't be. . . . I'll go myself, I'll speak myself . . . how . . . why should she sell it? Wait a bit, wait a bit."

And he dashed out bareheaded.

"Where are you off to, Akim Ivanitch?" said the servant Fetinya, running into him in the doorway.

"To our mistress! Let me pass! To our mistress!" wailed Akim, and seeing Naum's cart which had not yet been taken into the yard, he jumped into it, snatched the reins and lash-

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ing the horse with all his might set off at full speed to his mistress's house.

"My lady, Lizaveta Prohorovna," he kept repeating to himself all the way, "how have I lost your favour? I should have thought I had done my best!"

And meantime he kept lashing and lashing the horse. Those who met him moved out of his way and gazed after him.

In a quarter of an hour Akim had reached Lizaveta Prohorovna's house, had galloped up to the front door, jumped out of the cart and dashed straight into the entry.

"What do you want?" muttered the frightened footman who was sleeping sweetly on the hall bench.

"The mistress, I want to see the mistress," said Akim loudly.

The footman was amazed.

"Has anything happened?" he began.

"Nothing has happened, but I want to see the mistress."

"What, what," said the footman, more and more astonished, and he slowly drew himself up.

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Akim pulled himself up. . . . He felt as though cold water had been poured on him.

"Announce to the mistress, please, Pyotr Yevgrafitch," he said with a low bow, "that Akim asks leave to see her."

"Very good . . . I'll go . . . I'll tell her . . . but you must be drunk, wait a bit," grumbled the footman, and he went off.

Akim looked down and seemed confused. . . . His determination had evaporated as soon as he went into the hall.

Lizaveta Prohorovna was confused, too, when she was informed that Akim had come. She immediately summoned Kirillovna to her boudoir.

"I can't see him," she began hurriedly, as soon as the latter appeared. "I absolutely cannot. What am I to say to him? I told you he would be sure to come and complain," she added in annoyance and agitation. "I told you."

"But why should you see him?" Kirillovna answered calmly, "there is no need to. Why should you be worried! No, indeed!"

"What is to be done then?"

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"If you will permit me, I will speak to him."

Lizaveta Prohorovna raised her head.

"Please do, Kirillovna. Talk to him. You tell him . . . that I found it necessary . . . but that I will compensate him . . . say what you think best. Please, Kirillovna."

"Don't you worry yourself, madam," answered Kirillovna, and she went out, her shoes creaking.

A quarter of an hour had not elapsed when their creaking was heard again and Kirillovna walked into the boudoir with the same unruffled expression on her face and the same sly shrewdness in her eyes.

"Well?" asked her mistress, "how is Akim?"

"He is all right, madam. He says that it must all be as you graciously please; that if only you have good health and prosperity he can get along very well."

"And he did not complain?"

"No, madam. Why should he complain?"

"What did he come for, then?" Lizaveta Prohorovna asked in some surprise.

"He came to ask whether you would excuse



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his yearly payment for next year, that is, until he has been compensated."

"Of course, of course," Lizaveta Prohorovna caught her up eagerly. "Of course, with pleasure. And tell him, in fact, that I will make it up to him. Thank you, Kirillovna. I see he is a good-hearted man. Stay," she added, "give him this from me," and she took a three-rouble note out of her work-table drawer, "Here, take this, give it to him."

"Certainly, madam," answered Kirillovna, and going calmly back to her room she locked the note in an iron-cased box which stood at the head of her bed; she kept in it all her spare cash, and there was a considerable amount of it.

Kirillovna had reassured her mistress by her report but the conversation between herself and Akim had not been quite what she represented. She had sent for him to the maid's room. At first he had not come, declaring that he did not want to see Kirillovna but Lizaveta Prohorovna herself; he had, however, at last obeyed and gone by the back door to see Kirillovna. He found her alone. He stopped at once on getting

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into the room and leaned against the wall by the door; he would have spoken but he could not.

Kirillovna looked at him intently.

"You want to see the mistress, Akim Semyonitch?" she began.

He simply nodded.

"It's impossible, Akim Semyonitch. And what's the use? What's done can't be undone, and you will only worry the mistress. She can't see you now, Akim Semyonitch."

"She cannot," he repeated and paused. "Well, then," he brought out at last, "so then my house is lost?"

"Listen, Akim Semyonitch. I know you have always been a sensible man. Such is the mistress's will and there is no changing it. You can't alter that. Whatever you and I might say about it would make no difference, would it?"

Akim put his arm behind his back.

"You'd better think," Kirillovna went on, "shouldn't you ask the mistress to let you off your yearly payment or something?"

"So my house is lost?" repeated Akim in the same voice.

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"Akim Semyonitch, I tell you, it's no use. You know that better than I do."

"Yes. Anyway, you might tell me what the house went for?"

"I don't know, Akim Semyonitch, I can't tell you. . . . But why are you standing?" she added. "Sit down."

"I'd rather stand, I am a peasant. I thank you humbly."

"You a peasant, Akim Semyonitch? You are as good as a merchant, let alone a house-serf! What do you mean? Don't distress yourself for nothing. Won't you have some tea?"

"No, thank you, I don't want it. So you have got hold of my house between you," he added, moving away from the wall. "Thank you for that. I wish you good-bye, my lady."

And he turned and went out. Kirillovna straightened her apron and went to her mistress.

"So I am a merchant, it seems," Akim said to himself, standing before the gate in hesitation. "A nice merchant!" He waved his hand and laughed bitterly. "Well, I suppose I had better go home."

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And entirely forgetting Naum's horse with which he had come, he trudged along the road to the inn. Before he had gone the first mile he suddenly heard the rattle of a cart beside him.

"Akim, Akim Semyonitch," someone called to him.

He raised his eyes and saw a friend of his, the parish clerk, Yefrem, nicknamed the Mole, a little, bent man with a sharp nose and dim-sighted eyes. He was sitting on a bundle of straw in a wretched little cart, and leaning forward against the box.

"Are you going home?" he asked Akim.

Akim stopped

"Yes."

"Shall I give you a lift?"

"Please do."

Yefrem moved to one side and Akim climbed into the cart. Yefrem, who seemed to be somewhat exhilarated, began lashing at his wretched little horse with the ends of his cord reins; it set off at a weary trot continually tossing its unbridled head.

They drove for nearly a mile without saying one word to each other. Akim sat with

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his head bent while Yefrem muttered to himself, alternately urging on and holding back his horse.

"Where have you been without your cap, Semyonitch?" he asked Akim suddenly and, without waiting for an answer, went on, "You've left it at some tavern, that's what you've done. You are a drinking man; I know you and I like you for it, that you are a drinker; you are not a murderer, not a rowdy, not one to make trouble; you are a good manager, but you are a drinker and such a drinker, you ought to have been pulled up for it long ago, yes, indeed; for it's a nasty habit. . . . Hurrah!" he shouted suddenly at the top of his voice, "Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"Stop! Stop!" a woman's voice sounded close by, "Stop!"

Akim looked round. A woman so pale and dishevelled that at first he did not recognise her, was running across the field towards the cart.

"Stop! Stop!" she moaned again, gasping for breath and waving her arms.

Akim started: it was his wife.

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He snatched up the reins.

"What's the good of stopping?" muttered Yefrem. "Stopping for a woman? Gee-up!"

But Akim pulled the horse up sharply. At that instant Avdotya ran up to the road and flung herself down with her face straight in the dust.

"Akim Semyonitch," she wailed, "he has turned me out, too!"

Akim looked at her and did not stir; he only gripped the reins tighter.

"Hurrah!" Yefrem shouted again.

"So he has turned you out?" said Akim.

"He has turned me out, Akim Semyonitch, dear," Avdotya answered, sobbing. "He has turned me out. The house is mine, he said, so you can go."

"Capital! That's a fine thing . . . capital," observed Yefrem.

"So I suppose you thought to stay on?" Akim brought out bitterly, still sitting in the cart.

"How could I! But, Akim Semyonitch," went on Avdotya, who had raised her head but let it sink to the earth again, "you don't know, I . . . kill me, Akim Semyonitch, kill me here on the spot."

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"Why should I kill you, Arefyevna?" said Akim dejectedly, "you've been your own ruin. What's the use?"

"But do you know what, Akim Semyonitch, the money . . . your money . . . your money's gone. . . . Wretched sinner as I am, I took it from under the floor, I gave it all to him, to that villain Naum. . . . Why did you tell me where you hid your money, wretched sinner as I am? . . . It's with your money he has bought the house, the villain."

Sobs choked her voice.

Akim clutched his head with both hands.

"What!" he cried at last, "all the money, too . . . the money and the house, and you did it. . . . Ah! You took it from under the floor, you took it. . . . I'll kill you, you snake in the grass!" And he leapt out of the cart.

"Semyonitch, Semyonitch, don't beat her, don't fight," faltered Yefrem, on whom this unexpected adventure began to have a sobering effect.

"No, Akim Semyonitch, kill me, wretched sinner as I am; beat me, don't heed him," cried Avdotya, writhing convulsively at Akim's feet.

He stood a moment, looked at her, moved a

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few steps away and sat down on the grass beside the road.

A brief silence followed. Avdotya turned her head in his direction.

"Semyonitch! hey, Semyonitch," began Yefrem, sitting up in the cart, "give over . . . you know . . . you won't make things any better. Tfoo, what a business," he went on as though to himself. "What a damnable woman. . . . Go to him," he added, bending down over the side of the cart to Avdotya, "you see, he's half crazy."

Avdotya got up, went nearer to Akim and again fell at his feet.

"Akim Semyonitch!" she began, in a faint voice.

Akim got up and went back to the cart. She caught at the skirt of his coat.

"Get away!" he shouted savagely, and pushed her off.

"Where are you going?" Yefrem asked, seeing that he was getting in beside him again.

"You were going to take me to my home," said Akim, "but take me to yours . . . you see, I have no home now. They have bought mine."



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"Very well, come to me. And what about her?"

Akim made no answer.

"And me? Me?" Avdotya repeated with tears, "are you leaving me all alone? Where am I to go?"

"You can go to him," answered Akim, without turning round, "the man you have given my money to. . . . Drive on, Yefrem!"

Yefrem lashed the horse, the cart rolled off, Avdotya set up a wail. . . .

Yefrem lived three-quarters of a mile from Akim's inn in a little house close to the priest's, near the solitary church with five cupolas which had been recently built by the heirs of a rich merchant in accordance with the latter's will. Yefrem said nothing to Akim all the way; he merely shook his head from time to time and uttered such ejaculations as "Dear, dear!" and "Upon my soul!" Akim sat without moving, turned a little away from Yefrem. At last they arrived. Yefrem was the first to get out of the cart. A little girl of six in a smock tied low round the waist ran out to meet him and shouted,

"Daddy! daddy!"

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"And where is your mother?" asked Yefrem.

"She is asleep in the shed."

"Well, let her sleep. Akim Semyonitch, won't you get out, sir, and come indoors?"

(It must be noted that Yefrem addressed him familiarly only when he was drunk. More important persons than Yefrem spoke to Akim with formal politeness.)

Akim went into the sacristan's hut.

"Here, sit on the bench," said Yefrem. "Run away, you little rascals," he cried to three other children who suddenly came out of different corners of the room together with two lean cats covered with wood ashes. "Get along! Sh-sh! Come this way, Akim Semyonitch, this way!" he went on, making his guest sit down, "and won't you take something?"

"I tell you what, Yefrem," Akim articulated at last, "could I have some vodka?"

Yefrem pricked up his ears.

"Vodka? You can. I've none in the house, but I will run this minute to Father Fyodor's. He always has it. . . . I'll be back in no time."

And he snatched up his cap with earflaps.

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"Bring plenty, I'll pay for it," Akim shouted after him. "I've still money enough for that."

"I'll be back in no time," Yefrem repeated again as he went out of the door. He certainly did return very quickly with two bottles under his arm, of which one was already uncorked, put them on the table, brought two little green glasses, part of a loaf and some salt.

"Now this is what I like," he kept repeating, as he sat down opposite Akim. "Why grieve?" He poured out a glass for Akim and another for himself and began talking freely. Avdotya's conduct had perplexed him. "It's a strange business, really," he said, "how did it happen? He must have bewitched her, I suppose? It shows how strictly one must look after a wife! You want to keep a firm hand over her. All the same it wouldn't be amiss for you to go home; I expect you have got a lot of belongings there still." Yefrem added much more to the same effect; he did not like to be silent when he was drinking.

This is what was happening an hour later in Yefrem's house. Akim, who had not answered a word to the questions and observations of

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his talkative host but had merely gone on drinking glass after glass, was sleeping on the stove, crimson in the face, a heavy, oppressive sleep; the children were looking at him in wonder, and Yefrem . . . Yefrem, alas, was asleep, too, but in a cold little lumber room in which he had been locked by his wife, a woman of very masculine and powerful physique. He had gone to her in the shed and begun threatening her or telling her some tale, but had expressed himself so unintelligibly and incoherently that she instantly saw what was the matter, took him by the collar and deposited him in a suitable place. He slept in the lumber room, however, very soundly and even serenely. Such is the effect of habit.

\* \* \* \* \*

Kirillovna had not quite accurately repeated to Lizaveta Prohorovna her conversation with Akim . . . the same may be said of Avdotya. Naum had not turned her out, though she had told Akim that he had; he had no right to turn her out. He was bound to give the former owners time to pack up. An explanation of quite

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a different character took place between him and Avdotya.

When Akim had rushed out crying that he would go to the mistress, Avdotya had turned to Naum, stared at him open-eyed and clasped her hands.

"Good heavens!" she cried, "Naum Ivanitch, what does this mean? You've bought our inn?"

"Well, what of it?" he replied. "I have."

Avdotya was silent for a while; then she suddenly started.

"So that is what you wanted the money for?"

"You are quite right there. Hullo, I believe your husband has gone off with my horse," he added, hearing the rumble of the wheels. "He is a smart fellow!"

"But it's robbery!" wailed Avdotya. "Why, it's our money, my husband's money and the inn is ours. . . ."

"No, Avdotya Arefyevna," Naum interrupted her, "the inn was not yours. What's the use of saying that? The inn was on your mistress's land, so it was hers. The money was yours, certainly; but you were, so to say, so

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kind as to present it to me; and I am grateful to you and will even give it back to you on occasion—if occasion arises; but you wouldn't expect me to remain a beggar, would you?"

Naum said all this very calmly and even with a slight smile.

"Holy saints!" cried Avdotya, "it's beyond everything! Beyond everything! How can I look my husband in the face after this? You villain," she added, looking with hatred at Naum's fresh young face. "I've ruined my soul for you, I've become a thief for your sake, why, you've turned us into the street, you villain! There's nothing left for me but to hang myself, villain, deceiver! You've ruined me, you monster!" And she broke into violent sobbing.

"Don't excite yourself, Avdotya Arefyevna," said Naum. "I'll tell you one thing: charity begins at home, and that's what the pike is in the sea for, to keep the carp from going to sleep."

"Where are we to go now. What's to become of us?" Avdotya faltered, weeping.

"That I can't say."

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"But I'll cut your throat, you villain, I'll cut your throat."

"No, you won't do that, Avdotya Arefyevna; what's the use of talking like that? But I see I had better leave you for a time, for you are very much upset. . . . I'll say good-bye, but I shall be back to-morrow for certain. But you must allow me to send my workmen here to-day," he added, while Avdotya went on repeating through her tears that she would cut his throat and her own.

"Oh, and here they are," he observed, looking out of the window. "Or, God forbid, some mischief might happen. . . . It will be safer so. Will you be so kind as to put your belongings together to-day and they'll keep guard here and help you, if you like. I'll say good-bye."

He bowed, went out and beckoned the workmen to him.

Avdotya sank on the bench, then bent over the table, wringing her hands, then suddenly leapt up and ran after her husband. . . . We have described their meeting.

When Akim drove away from her with

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Yefrem, leaving her alone in the field, for a long time she remained where she was, weeping. When she had wept away all her tears she went in the direction of her mistress's house. It was very bitter for her to go into the house, still more bitter to go into the maids' room. All the maids flew to meet her with sympathy and consideration. Seeing them, Avdotya could not restrain her tears; they simply spurted from her red and swollen eyes. She sank, helpless, on the first chair that offered itself. Someone ran to fetch Kirillovna. Kirillovna came, was very friendly to her, but kept her from seeing the mistress just as she had Akim. Avdotya herself did not insist on seeing Lizaveta Prohorovna; she had come to her old home simply because she had nowhere else to go.

Kirillovna ordered the samovar to be brought in. For a long while Avdotya refused to take tea, but yielded at last to the entreaties and persuasion of all the maids and after the first cup drank another four. When Kirillovna saw that her guest was a little calmer and only shuddered and gave a faint sob from time to time,



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she asked her where they meant to move to and what they thought of doing with their things. Avdotya began crying again at this question, and protesting that she wanted nothing but to die; but Kirillovna as a woman with a head on her shoulders, checked her at once and advised her without wasting time to set to work that very day to move their things to the hut in the village which had been Akim's and in which his uncle (the old man who had tried to dissuade him from his marriage) was now living; she told her that with their mistress's permission men and horses should be sent to help them in packing and moving. "And as for you, my love," added Kirillovna, twisting her cat-like lips into a wry smile, "there will always be a place for you with us and we shall be delighted if you stay with us till you are settled in a house of your own again. The great thing is not to lose heart. The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away and will give again. Lizaveta Prohorovna, of course, had to sell your inn for reasons of her own but she will not forget you and will make up to you for it; she told me to tell Akim Semyonitch so. Where is he now?"

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Avdotyia answered that when he met her he had been very unkind to her and had driven off to Yefrem's.

"Oh, to that fellow's!" Kirillovna replied significantly. "Of course, I understand that it's hard for him now. I daresay you won't find him to-day; what's to be done? I must make arrangements. Malashka," she added, turning to one of the maids, "ask Nikanop Ilyitch to come here: we will talk it over with him."

Nikanop Ilyitch, a feeble-looking man who was bailiff or something of the sort, made his appearance at once, listened with servility to all that Kirillovna said to him, said, "it shall be done," went out and gave orders. Avdotya was given three waggons and three peasants; a fourth who said that he was "more competent than they were," volunteered to join them and she went with them to the inn where she found her own labourers and the servant Fetinya in a state of great confusion and alarm.

Naum's newly hired labourers, three very stalwart young men, had come in the morning and had not left the place since. They were

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keeping very zealous guard, as Naum had said they would—so zealous that the iron tyres of a new cart were suddenly found to be missing.

It was a bitter, bitter task for poor Avdotya to pack. In spite of the help of the "competent" man, who turned out, however, only capable of walking about with a stick in his hand, looking at the others and spitting on the ground, she was not able to get it finished that day and stayed the night at the inn, begging Fetinya to spend the night in her room. But she only fell into a feverish doze towards morning and the tears trickled down her cheeks even in her sleep.

Meanwhile Yefrem woke up earlier than usual in his lumber room and began knocking and asking to be let out. At first his wife was unwilling to release him and told him through the door that he had not yet slept long enough; but he aroused her curiosity by promising to tell her of the extraordinary thing that had happened to Akim; she unbolted the door. Yefrem told her what he knew and ended by asking "Is he awake yet, or not?"

"The Lord only knows," answered his wife.

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"Go and look yourself ; he hasn't got down from the stove yet. How drunk you both were yesterday ! You should look at your face—you don't look like yourself. You are as black as a sweep and your hair is full of hay !"

"That doesn't matter," answered Yefrem, and, passing his hand over his head, he went into the room. Akim was no longer asleep ; he was sitting on the stove with his legs hanging down ; he, too, looked strange and unkempt. His face showed the effects the more as he was not used to drinking much.

"Well, how have you slept, Akim Semyonitch?" Yefrem began.

Akim looked at him with lustreless eyes.

"Well, brother Yefrem," he said huskily, "could we have some again?"

Yefrem took a swift glance at Akim. . . . He felt a slight tremor at that moment ; it was a tremor such as is felt by a sportsman when he hears the yap of his dog at the edge of the wood from which he had fancied all the game had been driven.

"What, more?" he asked at last.

"Yes, more."

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

"My wife will see," thought Yefrem, "she won't let me out, most likely.

"All right," he pronounced aloud, "have a little patience."

He went out and, thanks to skilfully taken precautions, succeeded in bringing in unseen a big bottle under his coat.

Akim took the bottle. But Yefrem did not sit down with him as he had the day before—he was afraid of his wife—and informing Akim that he would go and have a look at what was going on at the inn and would see that his belongings were being packed and not stolen—at once set off, riding his little horse which he had neglected to feed—but judging from the bulging front of his coat he had not forgotten his own needs.

Soon after he had gone, Akim was on the stove again, sleeping like the dead. . . . He did not wake up, or at least gave no sign of waking when Yefrem returned four hours later and began shaking him and trying to rouse him and muttering over him some very muddled phrases such as that "everything was moved and gone, and the ikons have been taken

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out and driven away and that everything was over, and that everyone was looking for him but that he, Yefrem, had given orders and not allowed them, . . ." and so on. But his mutterings did not last long. His wife carried him off to the lumber room again and, very indignant both with her husband and with the visitor, owing to whom her husband had been drinking, lay down herself in the room on the shelf under the ceiling. . . . But when she woke up early, as her habit was, and glanced at the stove, Akim was not there. The second cock had not crowed and the night was still so dark that the sky hardly showed grey overhead and at the horizon melted into the darkness when Akim walked out of the gate of the sacristan's house. His face was pale but he looked keenly around him and his step was not that of a drunken man. . . . He walked in the direction of his former dwelling, the inn, which had now completely passed into the possession of its new owner—Naum.

Naum, too, was awake when Akim stole out of Yefrem's house. He was not asleep; he was lying on a bench with his sheepskin coat

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under him. It was not that his conscience was troubling him—no! he had with amazing coolness been present all day at the packing and moving of al' Akim's possessions and had more than once addressed Avdotya, who was so downcast that she did not even reproach him . . . his conscience was at rest but he was disturbed by various conjectures and calculations. He did not know whether he would be lucky in his new career; he had never before kept an inn, nor had a home of his own at all; he could not sleep. The thing has begun well," he thought, "how will it go on?" . . . Towards evening, after seeing off the last cart with Akim's belongings (Avdotya walked behind it, weeping), he looked all over the yard, the cellars, sheds, and barns, clambered up into the loft, more than once instructed his labourers to keep a very, very sharp look-out and when he was left alone after supper could not go to sleep. It so happened that day that no visitor stayed at the inn for the night; this was a great relief to him. "I must certainly buy a dog from the miller tomorrow, as fierce a one as I can get; they've taken theirs away," he said to himself, as he

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tossed from side to side, and all at once he raised his head quickly . . . he fancied that someone had passed by the window . . . he listened . . . there was nothing. Only a cricket from time to time gave a cautious churr, and a mouse was scratching somewhere; he could hear his own breathing. Everything was still in the empty room dimly lighted by the little glass lamp which he had managed to hang up and light before the ikon in the corner. . . . He let his head sink; again he thought he heard the gate creak . . . then a faint snapping sound from the fence. . . . He could not refrain from jumping up; he opened the door of the room and in a low voice called, "Fyodor! Fyodor!" No one answered. . . . He went out into the passage and almost fell over Fyodor, who was lying on the floor. The man stirred in his sleep with a faint grunt; Naum roused him.

"What's there? What do you want?" Fyodor began.

"What are you bawling for, hold your tongue!" Naum articulated in a whisper. "How you sleep, you damned fellows! Have you heard nothing?"



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"Nothing," answered the man. . . . "What is it?"

"Where are the others sleeping?"

"Where they were told to sleep. . . .Why, is there anything . . ."

"Hold your tongue—come with me."

Naum stealthily opened the door and went out into the yard. It was very dark outside. . . . The roofed-in parts and the posts could only be distinguished because they were a still deeper black in the midst of the black darkness.

"Shouldn't we light a lantern?" said Fyodor in a low voice.

But Naum waved his hand and held his breath. . . . At first he could hear nothing but those nocturnal sounds which can almost always be heard in an inhabited place: a horse was munching oats, a pig grunted faintly in its sleep, a man was snoring somewhere; but all at once his ear detected a suspicious sound coming from the very end of the yard, near the fence.

Someone seemed to be stirring there, and breathing or blowing. Naum looked over his shoulder towards Fyodor and cautiously descending the steps went towards the sound.

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. . . Once or twice he stopped, listened and stole on further. . . . Suddenly he started. . . . Ten paces from him, in the thick darkness there came the flash of a bright light: it was a glowing ember and close to it there was visible for an instant the front part of a face with lips thrust out. . . . Quickly and silently, like a cat at a mouse, Naum darted to the fire. . . . Hurriedly rising up from the ground a long body rushed to meet him and, nearly knocking him off his feet, almost eluded his grasp; but Naum hung on to it with all his strength.

"Fyodor! Andrey! Petrushka!" he shouted at the top of his voice. "Make haste! here! here! I've caught a thief trying to set fire to the place. . . ."

The man whom he had caught fought and struggled violently . . . but Naum did not let him go. Fyodor at once ran to his assistance.

"A lantern! Make haste, a lantern! Run for a lantern, wake the others!" Naum shouted to him. "I can manage him alone for a time—I am sitting on him. . . . Make haste! And bring a belt to tie his hands."

Fyodor ran into the house. . . . The man

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whom Naum was holding suddenly left off struggling.

"So it seems wife and money and home are not enough for you, you want to ruin me, too," he said in a choking voice.

Naum recognised Akim's voice.

"So that's you, my friend," he brought out; "very good, you wait a bit."

"Let me go," said Akim, "aren't you satisfied?"

"I'll show you before the judge to-morrow whether I am satisfied," and Naum tightened his grip of Akim.

The labourers ran up with two lanterns and cords. "Tie his arms," Naum ordered sharply. The men caught hold of Akim, stood him up and twisted his arms behind his back. . . . One of them began abusing him, but recognising the former owner of the inn lapsed into silence and only exchanged glances with the others.

"Do you see, do you see!" Naum kept repeating, meanwhile throwing the light of the lantern on the ground, "there are hot embers in the pot; look, there's a regular log alight here! We must find out where he got this pot

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. . . here, he has broken up twigs, too," and Naum carefully stamped out the fire with his foot. "Search him, Fyodor," he added, "see if he hasn't got something else on him."

Fyodor rummaged Akim's pockets and felt him all over while the old man stood motionless, with his head drooping on his breast as though he were dead.

"Here's a knife," said Fyodor, taking an old kitchen knife out of the front of Akim's coat.

"Aha, my fine gentleman, so that's what you were after," cried Naum. "Lads, you are witnesses . . . here he wanted to murder me and set fire to the house. . . . Lock him up for the night in the cellar, he can't get out of that. . . . I'll keep watch all night myself and to-morrow as soon as it is light we will take him to the police captain . . . and you are witnesses, do you hear!"

Akim was thrust into the cellar and the door was slammed. . . . Naum set two men to watch it and did not go to bed himself.

Meanwhile, Yefrem's wife having convinced herself that her uninvited guest had gone, set about her cooking though it was hardly daylight.

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. . . It was a holiday. She squatted down before the stove to get a hot ember and saw that someone had scraped out the hot ashes before her; then she wanted her knife and searched for it in vain; then of her four cooking pots one was missing. Yefrem's wife had the reputation of being a woman with brains, and justly so. She stood and pondered, then went to the lumber room, to her husband. It was not easy to wake him—and still more difficult to explain to him why he was being awakened. . . . To all that she said to him Yefrem made the same answer.

"He's gone away—well, God bless him. . . . What business is it of mine? He's taken our knife and our pot—well, God bless him, what has it to do with me?"

At last, however, he got up and after listening attentively to his wife came to the conclusion that it was a bad business, that something must be done.

"Yes," his wife repeated, "it is a bad business; maybe he will be doing mischief in his despair. . . . I saw last night that he was not asleep but was just lying on the stove; it would

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be as well for you to go and see, Yefrem Alexandritch."

"I tell you what, Ulyana Fyodorovna," Yefrem began, "I'll go myself to the inn now, and you be so kind, mother, as to give me just a drop to sober me."

Ulyana hesitated.

"Well," she decided at last, "I'll give you the vodka, Yefrem Alexandritch; but mind now, none of your pranks."

"Don't you worry, Ulyana Fyodorovna."

And fortifying himself with a glass, Yefrem made his way to the inn.

It was only just getting light when he rode up to the inn but, already a cart and a horse were standing at the gate and one of Naum's labourers was sitting on the box holding the reins.

"Where are you off to?" asked Yefrem.

"To the town," the man answered reluctantly.

"What for?"

The man simply shrugged his shoulders and did not answer. Yefrem jumped off his horse and went into the house. In the entry he came upon Naum, fully dressed and with his cap on.

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"I congratulate the new owner on his new abode," said Yefrem, who knew him. "Where are you off to so early?"

"Yes, you have something to congratulate me on," Naum answered grimly. "On the very first day the house has almost been burnt down."

Yefrem started. "How so?"

"Oh, a kind soul turned up who tried to set fire to it. Luckily I caught him in the act; now I am taking him to the town."

"Was it Akim, I wonder?" Yefrem asked slowly.

"How did you know? Akim. He came at night with a burning log in a pot and got into the yard and was setting fire to it . . . all my men are witnesses. Would you like to see him? It's time for us to take him, by the way."

"My good Naum Ivanitch," Yefrem began, "let him go, don't ruin the old man altogether. Don't take that sin upon your soul, Naum Ivanitch. Only think—the man was in despair—he didn't know what he was doing."

"Give over that nonsense," Naum cut him short. "What! Am I likely to let him go! Why, he'd set fire to the house to-morrow if I did."

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"He wouldn't, Naum Ivanitch, believe me. Believe me you will be easier yourself for it—you know there will be questions asked, a trial—you can see that for yourself."

"Well, what if there is a trial? I have no reason to be afraid of it."

"My good Naum Ivanitch, one must be afraid of a trial."

"Oh, that's enough. I see you are drunk already, and to-day a saint's day, too!"

Yefrem all at once, quite unexpectedly, burst into tears.

"I am drunk but I am speaking the truth," he muttered. "And for the sake of the holiday you ought to forgive him."

"Well, come along, you sniveller."

And Naum went out on to the steps.

"Forgive him, for Avdotya Arefyevna's sake," said Yefrem following him on to the steps.

Naum went to the cellar and flung the door wide open. With timid curiosity Yefrem craned his neck from behind Naum and with difficulty made out the figure of Akim in the corner of the cellar. The once well-to-do inn-keeper, respected all over the neighbourhood,



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was sitting on straw with his hands tied behind him like a criminal. Hearing a noise he raised his head. . . . It seemed as though he had grown fearfully thin in those last few days, especially during the previous night—his sunken eyes could hardly be seen under his high, waxen-yellow forehead, his parched lips looked dark . . . his whole face was changed and wore a strange expression — savage and frightened.

“Get up and come along,” said Naum.

Akim got up and stepped over the threshold.

“Akim Semyonitch!” Yefrem wailed, “you’ve brought ruin on yourself, my dear!”

Akim glanced at him without speaking.

“If I had known why you asked for vodka I would not have given it to you, I really would not. I believe I would have drunk it all myself! Eh, Naum Ivanitch,” he added clutching at Naum’s arm, “have mercy upon him, let him go!”

“What next!” Naum replied with a grin. “Well, come along,” he added addressing Akim again. “What are you waiting for?”

“Naum Ivanitch,” Akim began.

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"What is it?"

"Naum Ivanitch," Akim repeated, "listen: I am to blame; I wanted to settle my accounts with you myself; but God must be the judge between us. You have taken everything from me, you know yourself, everything I had. Now you can ruin me, only I tell you this: if you let me go now, then—so be it—take possession of everything! I agree and wish you all success. I promise you as before God, if you let me go you will not regret it. God be with you."

Akim shut his eyes and ceased speaking.

"A likely story!" retorted Naum, "as though one could believe you!"

"But, by God, you can," said Yefrem, "you really can. I'd stake my life on Akim Semyonitch's good faith—I really would."

"Nonsense," cried Naum. "Come along."

Akim looked at him.

"As you think best, Naum Ivanitch. It's for you to decide. But you are laying a great burden on your soul. Well, if you are in such a hurry, let us start."

Naum in his turn looked keenly at Akim.

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"After all," he thought to himself, "hadn't I better let him go? Or people will never have done pestering me about him. Avdotya will give me no peace." While Naum was reflecting, no one uttered a word. The labourer in the cart who could see it all through the gate did nothing but toss his head and flick the horse's sides with the reins. The two other labourers stood on the steps and they too were silent.

"Well, listen, old man," Naum began, "when I let you go and tell these fellows" (he motioned with his head towards the labourers) "not to talk, shall we be quits—do you understand me—quits . . . eh?"

"I tell you, you can have it all."

"You won't consider me in your debt?"

"You won't be in my debt, I shall not be in yours."

Naum was silent again.

"And will you swear it?"

"Yes, as God is holy," answered Akim.

"Well, I know I shall regret it," said Naum, "but there, come what may! Give me your hands."

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Akim turned his back to him; Naum began untying him.

"Now, mind, old man," he added as he pulled the cord off his wrists, "remember, I have spared you, mind that!"

"Naum Ivanitch, my dear," faltered Yefrem, "the Lord will have mercy upon you!"

Akim freed his chilled and swollen hands and was moving towards the gate.

Naum suddenly "showed the Jew" as the saying is—he must have regretted that he had let Akim off.

"You've sworn now, mind!" he shouted after him. Akim turned, and looking round the yard, said mournfully, "Possess it all, so be it forever! . . . Good-bye."

And he went slowly out into the road accompanied by Yefrem. Naum ordered the horse to be unharnessed and with a wave of his hand went back into the house.

"Where are you off to, Akim Semyonitch? Aren't you coming back to me?" cried Yefrem, seeing that Akim was hurrying to the right out of the high road.

"No, Yefremushka, thank you," answered

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Akim. "I am going to see what my wife is doing."

"You can see afterwards. . . . But now we ought to celebrate the occasion."

"No, thank you, Yefrem. . . . I've had enough. Good-bye."

And Akim walked off without looking round.

"Well! 'I've had enough!'" the puzzled sacristan pronounced. "And I pledged my word for him! Well, I never expected this," he added, with vexation, "after I had pledged my word for him, too!"

He remembered that he had not thought to take his knife and his pot and went back to the inn. . . . Naum ordered his things to be given to him but never even thought of offering him a drink. He returned home thoroughly annoyed and thoroughly sober.

"Well?" his wife inquired, "found?"

"Found what?" answered Yefrem, "to be sure I've found it: here is your pot."

"Akim?" asked his wife with especial emphasis.

Yefrem nodded his head.

"Yes. But he is a nice one! I pledged my

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word for him; if it had not been for me he'd be lying in prison, and he never offered me a drop! Ulyana Fyodorovna, you at least might show me consideration and give me a glass!"

But Ulyana Fyodorovna did not show him consideration and drove him out of her sight.

Meanwhile, Akim was walking with slow steps along the road to Lizaveta Prohorovna's house. He could not yet fully grasp his position; he was trembling all over like a man who had just escaped from a certain death. He seemed unable to believe in his freedom. In dull bewilderment he gazed at the fields, at the sky, at the larks quivering in the warm air. From the time he had woken up on the previous morning at Yefrem's he had not slept, though he had lain on the stove without moving; at first he had wanted to drown in vodka the insufferable pain of humiliation, the misery of frenzied and impotent anger . . . but the vodka had not been able to stupefy him completely; his anger became overpowering and he began to think how to punish the man who had wronged him. . . . He thought of no one but Naum; the idea of Lizaveta Prohorovna never entered his

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head and on Avdotya he mentally turned his back. By the evening his thirst for revenge had grown to a frenzy, and the good-natured and weak man waited with feverish impatience for the approach of night and ran, like a wolf to its prey, to destroy his old home. . . . But then he had been caught . . . locked up. . . . The night had followed. What had he not thought over during that cruel night! It is difficult to put into words all that a man passes through at such moments, all the tortures that he endures; more difficult because those tortures are dumb and inarticulate in the man himself. . . . Towards morning, before Naum and Yefrem had come to the door, Akim had begun to feel as it were more at ease. Everything is lost, he thought, everything is scattered and gone . . . and he dismissed it all. If he had been naturally bad-hearted he might at that moment have become a criminal; but evil was not natural to Akim. Under the shock of undeserved and unexpected misfortune, in the delirium of despair he had brought himself to crime; it had shaken him to the depths of his being and, failing, had left in him nothing but

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intense weariness. . . . Feeling his guilt in his mind he mentally tore himself from all things earthly and began praying, bitterly but fervently. At first he prayed in a whisper, then perhaps by accident he uttered a loud "Oh, God!" and tears gushed from his eyes. . . . For a long time he wept and at last grew quieter. . . . His thoughts would probably have changed if he had had to pay the penalty of his attempted crime . . . but now he had suddenly been set free . . . and he was walking to see his wife, feeling only half alive, utterly crushed but calm.

Lizaveta Prohorovna's house stood about a mile from her village to the left of the cross road along which Akim was walking. He was about to stop at the turning that led to his mistress's house . . . but he walked on instead. He decided first to go to what had been his hut, where his uncle lived.

Akim's small and somewhat dilapidated hut was almost at the end of the village; Akim walked through the whole street without meeting a soul. All the people were at church. Only one sick old woman raised a little window to



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look after him and a little girl who had run out with an empty pail to the well gaped at him, and she too looked after him. The first person he met was the uncle he was looking for. The old man had been sitting all the morning on the ledge under his window taking pinches of snuff and warming himself in the sun; he was not very well, so he had not gone to church; he was just setting off to visit another old man, a neighbour who was also ailing, when he suddenly saw Akim. . . . He stopped, let him come up to him and glancing into his face, said:

“Good-day, Akimushka!”

“Good-day,” answered Akim, and passing the old man went in at the gate. In the yard were standing his horses, his cow, his cart; his poultry, too, were there. . . . He went into the hut without a word. The old man followed him. Akim sat down on the bench and leaned his fists on it. The old man standing at the door looked at him compassionately.

“And where is my wife?” asked Akim.

“At the mistress’s house,” the old man answered quickly. “She is there. They put your

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cattle here and what boxes there were, and she has gone there. Shall I go for her?"

Akim was silent for a time.

"Yes, do," he said at last.

"Oh, uncle, uncle," he brought out with a sigh while the old man was taking his hat from a nail, "do you remember what you said to me the day before my wedding?"

"It's all God's will, Akimushka."

"Do you remember you said to me that I was above you peasants, and now you see what times have come. . . . I'm stripped bare myself."

"There's no guarding oneself from evil folk," answered the old man, "if only someone such as a master, for instance, or someone in authority, could give him a good lesson, the shameless fellow—but as it is, he has nothing to be afraid of. He is a wolf and he behaves like one." And the old man put on his cap and went off.

Avdotya had just come back from church when she was told that her husband's uncle was asking for her. Till then she had rarely seen him; he did not come to see them at the

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inn and had the reputation of being queer altogether: he was passionately fond of snuff and was usually silent.

She went out to him.

"What do you want, Petrovitch? Has anything happened?"

"Nothing has happened, Avdotya Arefyevna; your husband is asking for you."

"Has he come back?"

"Yes."

"Where is he, then?"

"He is in the village, sitting in his hut."

Avdotya was frightened.

"Well, Petrovitch," she inquired, looking straight into his face, "is he angry?"

"He does not seem so."

Avdotya looked down.

"Well, let us go," she said. She put on a shawl and they set off together. They walked in silence to the village. When they began to get close to the hut, Avdotya was so overcome with terror that her knees began to tremble.

"Good Petrovitch," she said, "go in first. . . . Tell him that I have come."

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The old man went into the hut and found Akim lost in thought, sitting just as he had left him.

"Well?" said Akim raising his head, "hasn't she come?"

"Yes," answered the old man, "she is at the gate. . . ."

"Well, send her in here."

The old man went out, beckoned to Avdotya, said to her, "go in," and sat down again on the ledge. Avdotya in trepidation opened the door, crossed the threshold and stood still.

Akim looked at her.

"Well, Arefyevna," he began, "what are we going to do now?"

"I am guilty," she faltered.

"Ech Arefyevna, we are all sinners. What's the good of talking about it!"

"It's he, the villain, has ruined us both," said Avdotya in a cringing voice, and tears flowed down her face. "You must not leave it like that, Akim Semyonitch, you must get the money back. Don't think of me. I am ready to take my oath that I only lent him the money.

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Lizaveta Prohorovna could sell our inn if she liked, but why should he rob us. . . . Get your money back."

"There's no claiming the money back from him," Akim replied grimly, "we have settled our accounts."

Avdotyia was amazed. "How is that?"

"Why, like this. Do you know," Akim went on and his eyes gleamed, "do you know where I spent the night? You don't know? In Naum's cellar, with my arms and legs tied like a sheep—that's where I spent the night. I tried to set fire to the place, but he caught me—Naum did; he is too sharp! And to-day he meant to take me to the town but he let me off; so I can't claim the money from him. . . . 'When did I borrow money from you?' he would say. Am I to say to him, 'My wife took it from under the floor and brought it to you'? 'Your wife is telling lies,' he will say. Hasn't there been scandal enough for you, Arefyevna? You'd better say nothing, I tell you, say nothing."

"I am guilty, Semyonitch, I am guilty," Avdotyia, terrified, whispered again.

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"That's not what matters," said Akim, after a pause. "What are we going to do? We have no home or no money."

"We shall manage somehow, Akim Semyonitch. We'll ask Lizaveta Prohorovna, she will help us, Kirillovna has promised me."

"No, Arefyenva, you and your Kirillovna had better ask her together; you are berries off the same bush. I tell you what: you stay here and good luck to you; I shall not stay here. It's a good thing we have no children, and I shall be all right, I dare say, alone. There's always enough for one."

"What will you do, Semyonitch? Take up driving again?"

Akim laughed bitterly.

"I should be a fine driver, no mistake! You have pitched on the right man for it! No, Arefyenva, that's a job not like getting married, for instance; an old man is no good for the job. I don't want to stay here, just because I don't want them to point the finger at me—do you understand? I am going to pray for my sins, Arefyevna, that's what I am going to do."

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"What sins have you, Semyonitch?" Avdotya pronounced timidly.

"Of them I know best myself, wife."

"But are you leaving me all alone, Semyonitch? How can I live without a husband?"

"Leaving you alone? Oh, Arefyevna, how you do talk, really! Much you need a husband like me, and old, too, and ruined as well! Why, you got on without me in the past, you can get on in the future. What property is left us, you can take; I don't want it."

"As you like, Semyonitch," Avdotya replied mournfully. "You know best."

"That's better. Only don't you suppose that I am angry with you, Arefyevna. No, what's the good of being angry when . . . I ought to have been wiser before. I've been to blame. I am punished." (Akim sighed.) "As you make your bed so you must lie on it. I am old, it's time to think of my soul. The Lord himself has brought me to understanding. Like an old fool I wanted to live for my own pleasure with a young wife. . . . No, the old man had better pray and beat his head against the earth and endure in patience and fast. . . . And now go

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along, my dear. I am very weary, I'll sleep a little."

And Akim with a groan stretched himself on the bench.

Avdotya wanted to say something, stood a moment, looked at him, turned away and went out.

"Well, he didn't beat you then?" asked Petrovitch sitting bent up on the ledge when she was level with him. Avdotya passed by him without speaking. "So he didn't beat her," the old man said to himself; he smiled, ruffled up his beard and took a pinch of snuff.

\* \* \* \* \*

Akim carried out his intention. He hurriedly arranged his affairs and a few days after the conversation we have described went, dressed ready for his journey, to say good-bye to his wife who had settled for a time in a little lodge in the mistress's garden. His farewell did not take long. Kirillovna, who happened to be present, advised Akim to see his mistress; he did so, Lizaveta Prohorovna received him with some confusion but graciously let him kiss her hand and asked him where he



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meant to go. He answered he was going first to Kiev and after that where it would please the Lord. She commended his decision and dismissed him. From that time he rarely appeared at home, though he never forgot to bring his mistress some holy bread. . . . But wherever Russian pilgrims gather his thin and aged but always dignified and handsome face could be seen: at the relics of St. Sergey; on the shores of the White Sea, at the Optin hermitage, and at the far-away Valaam; he went everywhere.

This year he has passed by you in the ranks of the innumerable people who go in procession behind the ikon of the Mother of God to the Korennaya; last year you found him sitting with a wallet on his shoulders with other pilgrims on the steps of Nikolay, the wonder-worker, at Mtsensk . . . he comes to Moscow almost every spring.

From land to land he has wandered with his quiet, unhurried, but never-resting step—they say he has been even to Jerusalem. He seems perfectly calm and happy and those who have chanced to converse with him have said much of his piety and humility.

## THE INN

Meanwhile, Naum's fortunes prospered exceedingly. He set to work with energy and good sense and got on, as the saying is, by leaps and bounds. Everyone in the neighbourhood knew by what means he had acquired the inn, they knew too that Avdotya had given him her husband's money; nobody liked Naum because of his cold, harsh disposition. . . . With censure they told the story of him that once when Akim himself had asked alms under his window he answered that God would give, and had given him nothing; but everyone agreed that there never had been a luckier man; his corn came better than other people's, his bees swarmed more frequently; even his hens laid more eggs; his cattle were never ill, his horses did not go lame. . . . It was a long time before Avdotya could bear to hear his name (she had accepted Lizaveta Prohorovna's invitation and had reentered her service as head sewing-maid), but in the end her aversion was somewhat softened; it was said that she had been driven by poverty to appeal to him and he had given her a hundred roubles. . . . She must not be too severely judged: poverty breaks any will and the sudden and violent change in her life

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had greatly aged and humbled her : it was hard to believe how quickly she lost her looks, how completely she let herself go and lost heart. . . .

How did it all end? the reader will ask. Why, like this : Naum, after having kept the inn successfully for about fifteen years, sold it advantageously to another townsman. He would never have parted from the inn if it had not been for the following, apparently insignificant, circumstance: for two mornings in succession his dog, sitting before the windows, had kept up a prolonged and doleful howl. He went out ~~into~~ the road the second time, looked attentively at the howling dog, shook his head, went up to town and the same day agreed on the price with a man who had been for a long time anxious to purchase it. A week later he had moved to a distance—out of the province; the new owner settled in and that very evening the inn was burnt to ashes; not a single out-building was left and Naum's successor was left a beggar. The reader can easily imagine the rumours that this fire gave rise to in the neighbourhood. . . . Evidently he carried his "luck" away with him, everyone repeated. Of Naum

## THE INN

it is said that he has gone into the corn trade and has made a great fortune. But will it last long? Stronger pillars have fallen and evil deeds end badly sooner or later. There is not much to say about Lizaveta Prohorovna. She is still living and, as is often the case with people of her sort, is not much changed, she has not even grown much older—she only seems to have dried up a little; on the other hand, her stinginess has greatly increased though it is difficult to say for whose benefit she is saving as she has no children and no attachments. In conversation she often speaks of Akim and declares that since she has understood his good qualities she has begun to feel great respect for the Russian peasant. Kirillovna bought her freedom for a considerable sum and married for love a fair-haired young waiter who leads her a dreadful life; Avdotya lives as before among the maids in Lizaveta Prohorovna's house, but has sunk to a rather lower position; she is very poorly, almost dirtily dressed, and there is no trace left in her of the townbred airs and graces of a fashionable maid or of the habits of a prosperous innkeeper's wife. . . .

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No one takes any notice of her and she herself is glad to be unnoticed; old Petrovitch is dead and Akim is still wandering, a pilgrim, and God only knows how much longer his pilgrimage will last!

1852.

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

### I

THAT evening Kuzma Vassilyevitch Yergunov told us his story again. He used to repeat it punctually once a month and we heard it every time with fresh satisfaction though we knew it almost by heart, in all its details. Those details overgrew, if one may so express it, the original trunk of the story itself as fungi grow over the stump of a tree. Knowing only too well the character of our companion, we did not trouble to fill in his gaps and incomplete statements. But now Kuzma Vassilyevitch is dead and there will be no one to tell his story and so we venture to bring it before the notice of the public.

### II

It happened forty years ago when Kuzma Vassilyevitch was young. He said of himself

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that he was at that time a handsome fellow and a dandy with a complexion of milk and roses, red lips, curly hair, and eyes like a falcon's. We took his word for it, though we saw nothing of that sort in him; in our eyes Kuzma Vassilyevitch was a man of very ordinary exterior, with a simple and sleepy-looking face and a heavy, clumsy figure. But what of that? There is no beauty the years will not mar! The traces of dandyism were more clearly preserved in Kuzma Vassilyevitch. He still in his old age wore narrow trousers with straps, laced in his corpulent figure, cropped the back of his head, curled his hair over his forehead and dyed his moustache with Persian dye, which had, however, a tint rather of purple, and even of green, than of black. With all that Kuzma Vassilyevitch was a very worthy gentleman, though at preference he did like to "steal a peep," that is, look over his neighbour's cards; but this he did not so much from greed as carefulness, for he did not like wasting his money. Enough of these parentheses, however; let us come to the story itself.

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

### III

It happened in the spring at Nikolaev, at that time a new town, to which Kuzma Vassilyevitch had been sent on a government commission. (He was a lieutenant in the navy.) He had, as a trustworthy and prudent officer, been charged by the authorities with the task of looking after the construction of ship-yards and from time to time received considerable sums of money, which for security he invariably carried in a leather belt on his person. Kuzma Vassilyevitch certainly was distinguished by his prudence and, in spite of his youth, his behaviour was exemplary; he studiously avoided every impropriety of conduct, did not touch cards, did not drink and even fought shy of society so that of his comrades, the quiet ones called him "a regular girl" and the rowdy ones called him a muff and a noodle. Kuzma Vassilyevitch had only one failing, he had a tender heart for the fair sex; but even in that direction he succeeded in restraining his impulses and did not allow himself to indulge in any "foolishness." He got up and went to bed



## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

early, was conscientious in performing his duties and his only recreation consisted in rather long evening walks about the outskirts of Nikolaev. He did not read as he thought it would send the blood to his head; every spring he used to drink a special decoction because he was afraid of being too full-blooded. Putting on his uniform and carefully brushing himself Kuzma Vassilyevitch strolled with a sedate step alongside the fences of orchards, often stopped, admired the beauties of nature, gathered flowers as souvenirs and found a certain pleasure in doing so; but he felt acute pleasure only when he happened to meet "a charmer," that is, some pretty little workgirl with a shawl flung over her shoulders, with a parcel in her ungloved hand and a gay kerchief on her head. Being as he himself expressed it of a susceptible but modest temperament Kuzma Vassilyevitch did not address the "charmer," but smiled ingratiatingly at her and looked long and attentively after her. . . . Then he would heave a deep sigh, go home with the same sedate step, sit down at the window and dream for half an hour, carefully smoking strong tobacco out of a meerschaum pipe with an amber mouthpiece

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

given him by his godfather, a police superintendent of German origin. So the days passed neither gaily nor drearily.

### IV

Well, one day, as he was returning home along an empty side-street at dusk Kuzma Vassilyevitch heard behind him hurried footsteps and incoherent words mingled with sobs. He looked round and saw a girl about twenty with an extremely pleasing but distressed and tear-stained face. She seemed to have been overtaken by some great and unexpected grief. She was running and stumbling as she ran, talking to herself, exclaiming, gesticulating; her fair hair was in disorder and her shawl (the burnous and the mantle were unknown in those days) had slipped off her shoulders and was kept on by one pin. The girl was dressed like a young lady, not like a workgirl.

Kuzma Vassilyevitch stepped aside; his feeling of compassion overpowered his fear of doing something foolish and, when she caught him up, he politely touched the peak of his shako, and asked her the cause of her tears.

"For," he added, and he laid his hand on

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his cutlass, "I, as an officer, may be able to help you."

The girl stopped and apparently for the first moment did not clearly understand what he wanted of her; but at once, as though glad of the opportunity of expressing herself, began speaking in slightly imperfect Russian.

"Oh, dear, Mr. Officer," she began and tears rained down her charming cheeks, "it is beyond everything! It's awful, it is beyond words! We have been robbed, the cook has carried off everything, everything, everything, the dinner service, the lock-up box and our clothes. . . . Yes, even our clothes, and stockings and linen, yes . . . and aunt's reticule. There was a twenty-five-rouble note and two appliqué spoons in it . . . and her pelisse, too, and everything. . . . And I told all that to the police officer and the police officer said, 'Go away, I don't believe you, I don't believe you. I won't listen to you. You are the same sort yourselves.' I said, 'Why, but the pelisse . . .' and he, 'I won't listen to you, I won't listen to you.' It was so insulting, Mr. Officer! 'Go away,' he said, 'get along,' but where am I to go?"

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

The girl sobbed convulsively, almost wailing, and utterly distracted leaned against Kuzma Vassilyevitch's sleeve. . . . He was overcome with confusion in his turn and stood rooted to the spot, only repeating from time to time, "There, there!" while he gazed at the delicate nape of the dishevelled damsel's neck, as it shook from her sobs.

"Will you let me see you home?" he said at last, lightly touching her shoulder with his forefinger, "here in the street, you understand, it is quite impossible. You can explain your trouble to me and of course I will make every effort . . . as an officer."

The girl raised her head and seemed for the first time to see the young man who might be said to be holding her in his arms. She was disconcerted, turned away, and still sobbing moved a little aside. Kuzma Vassilyevitch repeated his suggestion. The girl looked at him askance through her hair which had fallen over her face and was wet with tears. (At this point Kuzma Vassilyevitch always assured us that this glance pierced through him "like an awl," and even attempted once to reproduce this mar-

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vellous glance for our benefit) and laying her hand within the crooked arm of the obliging lieutenant, set off with him for her lodging.

### V

Kuzma Vassilyevitch had had very little to do with ladies and so was at a loss how to begin the conversation, but his companion chattered away very fluently, continually drying her eyes and shedding fresh tears. Within a few minutes Kuzma Vassilyevitch had learnt that her name was Emilie Karlovna, that she came from Riga and that she had come to Nikolaev to stay with her aunt who was from Riga, too, that her papa too had been in the army but had died from "his chest," that her aunt had a Russian cook, a very good and inexpensive cook but she had not a passport and that this cook had that very day robbed them and run away. She had had to go to the police—in *die Polizei*. . . . But here the memories of the police superintendent, of the insult she had received from him, surged up again . . . and sobs broke out afresh. Kuzma Vassilyevitch was once more at a loss what to say to comfort her. But

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

the girl, whose impressions seemed to come and go very rapidly, stopped suddenly and holding out her hand, said calmly:

"And this is where we live!"

### VI

It was a wretched little house that looked as though it had sunk into the ground, with four little windows looking into the street. The dark green of geraniums blocked them up within; a candle was burning in one of them; night was already coming on. A wooden fence with a hardly visible gate stretched from the house and was almost of the same height. The girl went up to the gate and finding it locked knocked on it impatiently with the iron ring of the padlock. Heavy footsteps were audible behind the fence as though someone in slippers trodden down at heel were carelessly shuffling towards the gate, and a husky female voice asked some question in German which Kuzma Vassilyevitch did not understand: like a regular sailor he knew no language but Russian. The girl answered in German, too; the gate opened a very little, admitted the girl and then

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was slammed almost in the face of Kuzma Vassilyevitch who had time, however, to make out in the summer twilight the outline of a stout, elderly woman in a red dress with a dimly burning lantern in her hand. Struck with amazement Kuzma Vassilyevitch remained for some time motionless in the street; but at the thought that he, a naval officer (Kuzma Vassilyevitch had a very high opinion of his rank) had been so discourteously treated, he was moved to indignation and turning on his heel he went homewards. He had not gone ten paces when the gate opened again and the girl, who had had time to whisper to the old woman, appeared in the gateway and called out aloud:

"Where are you going, Mr. Officer! Please come in."

Kuzma Vassilyevitch hesitated a little; he turned back, however.

## VII

This new acquaintance, whom we will call Emilie, led him through a dark, damp little lobby into a fairly large but low-pitched and

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

untidy room with a huge cupboard against the further wall and a sofa covered with American leather; above the doors and between the windows hung three portraits in oils with the paint peeling off, two representing bishops in clerical caps and one a Turk in a turban; cardboard boxes were lying about in the corners; there were chairs of different sorts and a crooked legged card table on which a man's cap was lying beside an unfinished glass of kvass. Kuzma Vassilyevitch was followed into the room by the old woman in the red dress, whom he had noticed at the gate, and who turned out to be a very unprepossessing Jewess with sullen pig-like eyes and a grey moustache over her puffy upper lip. Emilie indicated her to Kuzma Vassilyevitch and said:

"This is my aunt, Madame Fritsche."

Kuzma Vassilyevitch was a little surprised but thought it his duty to introduce himself. Madame Fritsche looked at him from under her brows, made no response, but asked her niece in Russian whether she would like some tea.

"Ah, yes, tea!" answered Emilie. "You will have some tea, won't you, Mr. Officer? Yes,



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auntie, give us some tea! But why are you standing, Mr. Officer? Sit down! Oh, how ceremonious you are! Let me take off my fichu."

When Emilie talked she continually turned her head from one side to another and jerked her shoulders; birds make similar movements when they sit on a bare branch with sunshine all round them.

Kuzma Vassilyevitch sank into a chair and assuming a becoming air of dignity, that is, leaning on his cutlass and fixing his eyes on the floor, he began to speak about the theft. But Emilie at once interrupted him.

"Don't trouble yourself, it's all right. Auntie has just told me that the principal things have been found." (Madame Fritsche mumbled something to herself and went out of the room.) "And there was no need to go to the police at all; but I can't control myself because I am so . . . You don't understand German? . . . So quick, *immer so rasch!* But I think no more about it . . . *aber auch gar nicht!*"

Kuzma Vassilyevitch looked at Emilie. Her face indeed showed no trace of care now.

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

Everything was smiling in that pretty little face: the eyes, fringed with almost white lashes, and the lips and the cheeks and the chin and the dimples in the chin, and even the tip of her turned-up nose. She went up to the little looking glass beside the cupboard and, screwing up her eyes and humming through her teeth, began tidying her hair. Kuzma Vassilyevitch followed her movements intently. . . . He found her very charming.

### VIII

"You must excuse me," she began again, turning from side to side before the looking glass, "for having so . . . brought you home with me. Perhaps you dislike it?"

"Oh, not at all!"

"As I have told you already, I am so quick. I act first and think afterwards, though sometimes I don't think at all. . . . What is your name, Mr. Officer? May I ask you?" she added going up to him and folding her arms.

"My name is Kuzma Vassilyevitch Yergunov."

"Yergu. . . . Oh, it's not a nice name! I

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mean it's difficult for me. I shall call you Mr. Florestan. At Riga we had a Mr. Florestan. He sold capital *gros-de-Naples* in his shop and was a handsome man, as good-looking as you. But how broad-shouldered you are! A regular sturdy Russian! I like the Russians. . . . I am a Russian myself . . . my papa was an officer. But my hands are whiter than yours!" She raised them above her head, waved them several times in the air, so as to drive the blood from them, and at once dropped them. "Do you see? I wash them with Greek scented soap. . . . Sniff! Oh, but don't kiss them. . . . I did not do it for that. . . . Where are you serving?"

"In the fleet, in the nineteenth Black Sea company."

"Oh, you are a sailor! Well, do you get a good salary?"

"No . . . not very."

"You must be very brave. One can see it at once from your eyes. What thick eyebrows you've got! They say you ought to grease them with lard overnight to make them grow. But why have you no moustache?"

"It's against the regulations."

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

"Oh, that's not right! What's that you've got, a dagger?"

"It's a cutlass; a cutlass, so to say, is the sailor's weapon."

"Ah, a cutlass! Is it sharp? May I look?" With an effort, biting her lip and screwing up her eyes, she drew the blade out of the scabbard and put it to her nose.

"Oh, how blunt! I can kill you with it in a minute!"

She waved it at Kuzma Vassilyevitch. He pretended to be frightened and laughed. She laughed too.

"*Ihr habt pardon*, you are pardoned," she pronounced, throwing herself into a majestic attitude. "There, take your weapon! And how old are you?" she asked suddenly.

"Twenty-five."

"And I am nineteen! How funny that is! Ach!" And Emilie went off into such a ringing laugh that she threw herself back in her chair. Kuzma Vassilyevitch did not get up from his chair and looked still more intently at her rosy face which was quivering with laughter and he felt more and more attracted by her.

All at once Emilie was silent and humming

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through her teeth, as her habit was, went back to the looking glass.

"Can you sing, Mr. Florestan?"

"No, I have never been taught."

"Do you play on the guitar? Not that either? I can. I have a guitar set with *perlenmutter* but the strings are broken. I must buy some new ones. You will give me the money, won't you, Mr. Officer? I'll sing you a lovely German song." She heaved a sigh and shut her eyes. "Ah, such a lovely one! But you can dance? Not that, either? *Unmöglich!* I'll teach you. The *schottische* and the *valse-cosaque*. Tra-la-la, tra-la-la," Emilie pirouetted once or twice. "Look at my shoes! From Warsaw. Oh, we will have some dancing, Mr. Florestan! But what are you going to call me?"

Kuzma Vassilyevitch grinned and blushed to his ears.

"I shall call you: lovely Emilie!"

"No, no! You must call me: *Mein Schätzchen, mein Zuckerpüppchen!* Repeat it after me."

"With the greatest pleasure, but I am afraid I shall find it difficult. . . ."

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

"Never mind, never mind. Say: *Mein*."

"Me-in."

"*Zucker*."

"Tsook-ker."

"*Püppchen! Püppchen! Püppchen!*"

"Poop . . . poop. . . . That I can't manage. It doesn't sound nice."

"No! You must . . . you must! Do you know what it means? That's the very nicest word for a young lady in German. I'll explain it to you afterwards. But here is auntie bringing us the samovar. Bravo! Bravo! auntie, I will have cream with my tea. . . . Is there any cream?"

"*So schweige doch*," answered the aunt.

## IX

Kuzma Vassilyevitch stayed at Madame Fritsche's till midnight. He had not spent such a pleasant evening since his arrival at Nikolaev. It is true that it occurred to him that it was not seemly for an officer and a gentleman to be associating with such persons as this native of Riga and her auntie, but Emilie was so pretty, babbled so amusingly and bestowed such friendly looks upon him, that he dismissed his

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rank and family and made up his mind for once to enjoy himself. Only one circumstance disturbed him and left an impression that was not quite agreeable. When his conversation with Emilie and Madame Fritsche was in full swing, the door from the lobby opened a crack and a man's hand in a dark cuff with three tiny silver buttons on it was stealthily thrust in and stealthily laid a big bundle on the chair near the door. Both ladies instantly darted to the chair and began examining the bundle. "But these are the wrong spoons!" cried Emilie, but her aunt nudged her with her elbow and carried away the bundle without tying up the ends. It seemed to Kuzma Vassilyevitch that one end was spattered with something red, like blood.

"What is it?" he asked Emilie. "Is it some more stolen things returned to you?"

"Yes," answered Emilie, as it were, reluctantly. "Some more."

"Was it your servant found them?"

Emilie frowned.

"What servant? We haven't any servant."

"Some other man, then?"

"No men come to see us."

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

"But excuse me, excuse me. . . . I saw the cuff of a man's coat or jacket. And, besides, this cap. . . ."

"Men never, never come to see us," Emilie repeated emphatically. "What did you see? You saw nothing! And that cap is mine."

"How is that?"

"Why, just that. I wear it for dressing up. . . . Yes, it is mine, *und Punctum*."

"Who brought you the bundle, then?"

Emilie made no answer and, pouting, followed Madame Fritsche out of the room. Ten minutes later she came back alone, without her aunt and when Kuzma Vassilyevitch tried to question her again, she gazed at his forehead, said that it was disgraceful for a gentleman to be so inquisitive (as she said this, her face changed a little, as it were, darkened), and taking a pack of old cards from the card table drawer, asked him to tell fortunes for her and the king of hearts.

Kuzma Vassilyevitch laughed, took the cards, and all evil thoughts immediately slipped out of his mind.

But they came back to him that very day.



## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

When he had got out of the gate into the street, had said good-bye to Emilie, shouted to her for the last time, "*Adieu, Zuckerpüppchen!*" a short man darted by him and turning for a minute in his direction (it was past midnight but the moon was shining rather brightly), displayed a lean gipsy face with thick black eyebrows and moustache, black eyes and a hooked nose. The man at once rushed round the corner and it struck Kuzma Vassilyevitch that he recognised—not his face, for he had never seen it before—but the cuff of his sleeve. Three silver buttons gleamed distinctly in the moonlight. There was a stir of uneasy perplexity in the soul of the prudent lieutenant; when he got home he did not light as usual his meer-schaum pipe. Though, indeed, his sudden acquaintance with charming Emilie and the agreeable hours spent in her company would alone have induced his agitation.

## X

Whatever Kuzma Vassilyevitch's apprehensions may have been, they were quickly dis-

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

sipated and left no trace. He took to visiting the two ladies from Riga frequently. The susceptible lieutenant was soon on friendly terms with Emilie. At first he was ashamed of the acquaintance and concealed his visits; later on he got over being ashamed and no longer concealed his visits; it ended by his being more eager to spend his time with his new friends than with anyone and greatly preferring their society to the cheerless solitude of his own four walls. Madame Fritsche herself no longer made the same unpleasant impression upon him, though she still treated him morosely and ungraciously. Persons in straitened circumstances like Madame Fritsche particularly appreciate a liberal expenditure in their visitors, and Kuzma Vassilyevitch was a little stingy and his presents for the most part took the shape of raisins, walnuts, cakes. . . . Only once he let himself go and presented Emilie with a light pink fichu of real French material, and that very day she had burnt a hole in his gift with a candle. He began to upbraid her; she fixed the fichu to the cat's tail; he was angry; she

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laughed in his face. Kuzma Vassilyevitch was forced at last to admit to himself that he had not only failed to win the respect of the ladies from Riga, but had even failed to gain their confidence: he was never admitted at once, without preliminary scrutinising; he was often kept waiting; sometimes he was sent away without the slightest ceremony and when they wanted to conceal something from him they would converse in German in his presence. Emilie gave him no account of her doings and replied to his questions in an offhand way as though she had not heard them; and, worst of all, some of the rooms in Madame Fritsche's house, which was a fairly large one, though it looked like a hovel from the street, were never opened to him. For all that, Kuzma Vassilyevitch did not give up his visits; on the contrary, he paid them more and more frequently: he was seeing living people, anyway. His vanity was gratified by Emilie's continuing to call him Florestan, considering him exceptionally handsome and declaring that he had eyes like a bird of paradise, "*wie die Augen eines Paradiesvögels!*"

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

### XI

One day in the very height of summer, Kuzma Vassilyevitch, who had spent the whole morning in the sun with contractors and workmen, dragged himself tired and exhausted to the little gate that had become so familiar to him. He knocked and was admitted. He shambled into the so-called drawing-room and immediately lay down on the sofa. Emilie went up to him and mopped his wet brow with a handkerchief.

"How tired he is, poor pet! How hot he is!" she said commiseratingly. "Good gracious! You might at least unbutton your collar. My goodness, how your throat is pulsing!"

"I am done up, my dear," groaned Kuzma Vassilyevitch. "I've been on my feet all the morning, in the baking sun. It's awful! I meant to go home. But there those vipers, the contractors, would find me! While here with you it is cool. . . . I believe I could have a nap."

"Well, why not? Go to sleep, my little chick; no one will disturb you here." . . .

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

"But I am really ashamed."

"What next! Why ashamed? Go to sleep. And I'll sing you . . . what do you call it? . . . I'll sing you to bye-bye, '*Schlaf, mein Kindchen, Schlafe!*'" She began singing.

"I should like a drink of water first."

"Here is a glass of water for you. Fresh as crystal! Wait, I'll put a pillow under your head. . . . And here is this to keep the flies off."

She covered his face with a handkerchief.

"Thank you, my little cupid. . . . I'll just have a tiny doze . . . that's all."

Kuzma Vassilyevitch closed his eyes and fell asleep immediately.

"*Schlaf, mein Kindchen, schlafe,*" sang Emilie, swaying from side to side and softly laughing at her song and her movements.

"What a big baby I have got!" she thought.  
"A boy!"

## XII

An hour and a half later the lieutenant awoke. He fancied in his sleep that someone touched him, bent over him, breathed over him.

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

He fumbled, and pulled off the kerchief. Emilie was on her knees close beside him; the expression of her face struck him as queer. She jumped up at once, walked away to the window and put something away in her pocket.

Kuzma Vassilyevitch stretched.

"I've had a good long snooze, it seems!" he observed, yawning. "Come here, *meine züsse Fraülein!*"

Emilie went up to him. He sat up quickly, thrust his hand into her pocket and took out a small pair of scissors.

"*Ach, Herr Je!*" Emilie could not help exclaiming.

"It's . . . it's a pair of scissors?" muttered Kuzma Vassilyevitch.

"Why, of course. What did you think it was . . . a pistol? Oh, how funny you look! You're as rumpled as a pillow and your hair is all standing up at the back. . . . And he doesn't laugh. . . . Oh, oh! And his eyes are puffy. . . . Oh!"

Emilie went off into a giggle.

"Come, that's enough," muttered Kuzma Vassilyevitch, and he got up from the sofa.

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

"That's enough giggling about nothing. If you can't think of anything more sensible, I'll go home. . . . I'll go home," he repeated, seeing that she was still laughing.

Emilie subsided.

"Come, stay; I won't. . . . Only you must brush your hair."

"No, never mind. . . . Don't trouble. I'd better go," said Kuzma Vassilyevitch, and he took up his cap.

Emilie pouted.

"Fie, how cross he is! A regular Russian! All Russians are cross. Now he is going. Fie! Yesterday he promised me five roubles and to-day he gives me nothing and goes away."

"I haven't any money on me," Kuzma Vassilyevitch muttered grumpily in the doorway. "Good-bye."

Emilie looked after him and shook her finger.

"No money! Do you hear, do you hear what he says? Oh, what deceivers these Russians are! But wait a bit, you pug. . . . Auntie, come here, I have something to tell you."

That evening as Kuzma Vassilyevitch was

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

undressing to go to bed, he noticed that the upper edge of his leather belt had come unsewn for about three inches. Like a careful man he at once procured a needle and thread, waxed the thread and stitched up the hole himself. He paid, however, no attention to this apparently trivial circumstance.

### XIII

The whole of the next day Kuzma Vassilyevitch devoted to his official duties; he did not leave the house even after dinner and right into the night was scribbling and copying out his report to his superior officer, mercilessly disregarding the rules of spelling, always putting an exclamation mark after the word *but* and a semi-colon after *however*. Next morning a barefoot Jewish boy in a tattered gown brought him a letter from Emilie—the first letter that Kuzma Vassilyevitch had received from her.

"Mein allerliebstep Florestan," she wrote to him, "can you really so cross with your Zuckerpüppchen be that you came not yesterday? Please be not cross if you wish not your merry Emilie to weep very bitterly and come, be sure,



## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

at 5 o'clock to-day." (The figure 5 was surrounded with two wreaths.) "I will be very, very glad. Your amiable Emilie." Kuzma Vassilyevitch was inwardly surprised at the accomplishments of his charmer, gave the Jew boy a copper coin and told him to say, "Very well, I will come."

### XIV

Kuzma Vassilyevitch kept his word: five o'clock had not struck when he was standing before Madame Fritsche's gate. But to his surprise he did not find Emilie at home; he was met by the lady of the house herself who—wonder of wonders!—dropping a preliminary curtsey, informed him that Emilie had been obliged by unforeseen circumstances to go out but she would soon be back and begged him to wait. Madame Fritsche had on a neat white cap; she smiled, spoke in an ingratiating voice and evidently tried to give an affable expression to her morose countenance, which was, however, none the more prepossessing for that, but on the contrary acquired a positively sinister aspect.

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

"Sit down, sit down, sir," she said, putting an easy chair for him, "and we will offer you some refreshment if you will permit it."

Madame Fritsche made another curtsey, went out of the room and returned shortly afterwards with a cup of chocolate on a small iron tray. The chocolate turned out to be of dubious quality; Kuzma Vassilyevitch drank the whole cup with relish, however, though he was at a loss to explain why Madame Fritsche was suddenly so affable and what it all meant. For all that Emilie did not come back and he was beginning to lose patience and feel bored when all at once he heard through the wall the sounds of a guitar. First there was the sound of one chord, then a second and a third and a fourth—the sound continually growing louder and fuller. Kuzma Vassilyevitch was surprised: Emilie certainly had a guitar but it only had three strings: he had not yet bought her any new ones; besides, Emilie was not at home. Who could it be? Again a chord was struck and so loudly that it seemed as though it were in the room. . . . Kuzma Vassilyevitch turned round and almost cried out in a fright. Be-

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

fore him, in a low doorway which he had not till then noticed—a big cupboard screened it—stood a strange figure . . . neither a child nor a grown-up girl. She was wearing a white dress with a bright-coloured pattern on it and red shoes with high heels; her thick black hair, held together by a gold fillet, fell like a cloak from her little head over her slender body. Her big eyes shone with sombre brilliance under the soft mass of hair; her bare, dark-skinned arms were loaded with bracelets and her hands covered with rings, held a guitar. Her face was scarcely visible, it looked so small and dark; all that was seen was the crimson of her lips and the outline of a straight and narrow nose. Kuzma Vassilyevitch stood for some time petrified and stared at the strange creature without blinking; and she, too, gazed at him without stirring an eyelid. At last he recovered himself and moved with small steps towards her.

The dark face began gradually smiling. There was a sudden gleam of white teeth, the little head was raised, and lightly flinging back the curls, displayed itself in all its startling and delicate beauty.

“What little imp is this?” thought Kuzma

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

Vassilyevitch, and, advancing still closer, he brought out in a low voice:

"Hey, little image! Who are you?"

"Come here, come here," the "little image" responded in a rather husky voice, with a halting un-Russian intonation and incorrect accent, and she stepped back two paces.

Kuzma Vassilyevitch followed her through the doorway and found himself in a tiny room without windows, the walls and floor of which were covered with thick camel's-hair rugs. He was overwhelmed by a strong smell of musk. Two yellow wax candles were burning on a round table in front of a low sofa. In the corner stood a bedstead under a muslin canopy with silk stripes and a long amber rosary with a red tassel at the end hung by the pillow.

"But excuse me, who are you?" repeated Kuzma Vassilyevitch.

"Sister . . . sister of Emilie."

"You are her sister? And you live here?"

"Yes . . . yes."

Kuzma Vassilyevitch wanted to touch "the image." She drew back.

"How is it she has never spoken of you?"

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

"Could not . . . could not."

"You are in concealment then . . . in hiding?"

"Yes."

"Are there reasons?"

"Reasons . . . reasons."

"Hm!" Again Kuzma Vassilyevitch would have touched the figure, again she stepped back. "So that's why I never saw you. I must own I never suspected your existence. And the old lady, Madame Fritsche, is your aunt, too?"

"Yes . . . aunt."

"Hm! You don't seem to understand Russian very well. What's your name, allow me to ask?"

"Colibri."

"What?"

"Colibri."

"Colibri! That's an out-of-the-way name! There are insects like that in Africa, if I remember right?"

## xv

Colibri gave a short, queer laugh . . . like a clink of glass in her throat. She shook her

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

head, looked round, laid her guitar on the table and going quickly to the door, abruptly shut it. She moved briskly and nimbly with a rapid, hardly audible sound like a lizard; at the back her hair fell below her knees.

"Why have you shut the door?" asked Kuzma Vassilyevitch.

Colibri put her fingers to her lips.

"Émilie . . . not want . . . not want her."

Kuzma Vassilyevitch grinned.

"I say, you are not jealous, are you?"

Colibri raised her eyebrows.

"What?"

"Jealous . . . angry," Kuzma Vassilyevitch explained.

"Oh, yes!"

"Really! Much obliged. . . . I say, how old are you?"

"Seventen."

"Seventeen, you mean?"

"Yes."

Kuzma Vassilyevitch scrutinised his fantastic companion closely.

"What a beautiful creature you are!" he said, emphatically. "Marvellous! Really marvel-

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

lous! What hair! What eyes! And your eyebrows . . . ough!"

Colibri laughed again and again looked round with her magnificent eyes.

"Yes, I am a beauty! Sit down, and I'll sit down . . . beside."

"By all means! But say what you like, you are a strange sister for Emilie! You are not in the least like her."

"Yes, I am sister . . . cousin. Here . . . take . . . a flower. A nice flower. It smells." She took out of her girdle a sprig of white lilac, sniffed it, bit off a petal and gave him the whole sprig. "Will you have jam? Nice jam . . . from Constantinople . . . sorbet?" Colibri took from the small chest of drawers a gilt jar wrapped in a piece of crimson silk wit steel spangles on it, a silver spoon, a cut glass decanter and a tumbler like it. "Eat some sorbet, sir; it is fine. I will sing to you. . . . Will you?" She took up the guitar.

"You sing, then?" asked Kuzma Vassilyevitch, putting a spoonful of really excellent sorbet into his mouth.

"Oh, yes!" She flung back her mane of hair,

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

put her head on one side and struck several chords, looking carefully at the tips of her fingers and at the top of the guitar . . . then suddenly began singing in a voice unexpectedly strong and agreeable, but guttural and to the ears of Kuzma Vassilyevitch rather savage. "Oh, you pretty kitten," he thought. She sang a mournful song, utterly un-Russian and in a language quite unknown to Kuzma Vassilyevitch. He used to declare that the sounds "Kha, gha" kept recurring in it and at the end she repeated a long drawn-out "sintamar" or "sintsimar," or something of the sort, leaned her head on her hand, heaved a sigh and let the guitar drop on her knee. "Good?" she asked, "want more?"

"I should be delighted," answered Kuzma Vassilyevitch. "But why do you look like that, as though you were grieving? You'd better have some sorbet."

"No . . . you. And I will again. . . . It will be more merry." She sang another song, that sounded like a dance, in the same unknown language. Again Kuzma Vassilyevitch distinguished the same guttural sounds. Her



## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

swarthy fingers fairly raced over the strings, "like little spiders," and she ended up this time with a jaunty shout of "Ganda" or "Gassa," and with flashing eyes banged on the table with her little fist.

### XVI

Kuzma Vassilyevitch sat as though he were in a dream. His head was going round. It was all so unexpected. . . . And the scent, the singing . . . the candles in the daytime . . . the sorbet flavoured with vanilla. And Colibri kept coming closer to him, too; her hair shone and rustled, and there was a glow of warmth from her—and that melancholy face. . . . "A russalka!" thought Kuzma Vassilyevitch. He felt somewhat awkward.

"Tell me, my pretty, what put it into your head to invite me to-day?"

"You are young, pretty . . . such I like."

"So that's it! But what will Emilie say? She wrote me a letter: she is sure to be back directly."

"You not tell her . . . nothing! Trouble! She will kill!"

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Kuzma Vassilyevitch laughed.

"As though she were so fierce!"

Colibri gravely shook her head several times.

"And to Madame Fritsche, too, nothing. No, no, no!" She tapped herself lightly on the forehead. "Do you understand, officer?"

Kuzma Vassilyevitch frowned.

"It's a secret, then?"

"Yes . . . yes."

"Very well. . . . I won't say a word. Only you ought to give me a kiss for that."

"No, afterwards . . . when you are gone."

"That's a fine idea!" Kuzma Vassilyevitch was bending down to her but she slowly drew herself back and stood stiffly erect like a snake startled in the grass. Kuzma Vassilyevitch stared at her. "Well!" he said at last, "you are a spiteful thing! All right, then."

Colibri pondered and turned to the lieutenant. . . . All at once there was the muffled sound of tapping repeated three times at even intervals somewhere in the house. Colibri laughed, almost snorted.

"To-day—no, to-morrow—yes. Come to-morrow."

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

"At what time?"

"Seven . . . in the evening."

"And what about Emilie?"

"Emilie . . . no; will not be here."

"You think so? Very well. Only, to-morrow you will tell me?"

"What?" (Colibri's face assumed a childish expression every time she asked a question.)

"Why you have been hiding away from me all this time?"

"Yes . . . yes; everything shall be to-morrow; the end shall be."

"Mind now! And I'll bring you a present."

"No . . . no need."

"Why not? I see you like fine clothes."

"No need. This . . . this . . . this . . ." she pointed to her dress, her rings, her bracelets, and everything about her, "it is all my own. Not a present. I do not take."

"As you like. And now must I go?"

"Oh, yes."

Kuzma Vassilyevitch got up. Colibri got up, too.

"Good-bye, pretty little doll! And when will you give me a kiss?"

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

Colibri suddenly gave a little jump and swiftly flinging both arms round his neck, gave him not precisely a kiss but a peck at his lips. He tried in his turn to kiss her but she instantly darted back and stood behind the sofa.

"To-morrow at seven o'clock, then?" he said with some confusion.

She nodded and taking a tress of her long hair with her two fingers, bit it with her sharp teeth.

Kuzma Vassilyevitch kissed his hand to her, went out and shut the door after him. He heard Colibri run up to it at once. . . . The key clicked in the lock.

### XVII

There was no one in Madame Fritsche's drawing-room. Kuzma Vassilyevitch made his way to the passage at once. He did not want to meet Emilie. Madame Fritsche met him on the steps.

"Ah, you are going, Mr. Lieutenant?" she said, with the same affected and sinister smile. "You won't wait for Emilie?"

Kuzma Vassilyevitch put on his cap.

"I haven't time to wait any longer, madam.

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

I may not come to-morrow, either. Please tell her so."

"Very good, I'll tell her. But I hope you haven't been dull, Mr. Lieutenant?"

"No, I have not been dull."

"I thought not. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

Kuzma Vassilyevitch returned home and stretching himself on his bed sank into meditation. He was unutterably perplexed. "What marvel is this?" he cried more than once. And why did Emilie write to him? She had made an appointment and not come! He took out her letter, turned it over in his hands, sniffed it: it smelt of tobacco and in one place he noticed a correction. But what could he deduce from that? And was it possible that Madame Fritsche knew nothing about it? And *she*. . . . Who was she? Yes, who was she? The fascinating Colibri, that "pretty doll," that "little image," was always before him and he looked forward with impatience to the following evening, though secretly he was almost afraid of this "pretty doll" and "little image."

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

### XVIII

Next day Kuzma Vassilyevitch went shopping before dinner, and, after persistent haggling, bought a tiny gold cross on a little velvet ribbon. "Though she declares," he thought, "that she never takes presents, we all know what such sayings mean; and if she really is so disinterested, Emilie won't be so squeamish." So argued this Don Juan of Nikolaev, who had probably never heard of the original Don Juan and knew nothing about him. At six o'clock in the evening Kuzma Vassilyevitch shaved carefully and sending for a hairdresser he knew, told him to pomade and curl his top-knot, which the latter did with peculiar zeal, not sparing the government note paper for curl-papers; then Kuzma Vassilyevitch put on a smart new uniform, took into his right hand a pair of new wash-leather gloves, and, sprinkling himself with lavender water, set off. Kuzma Vassilyevitch took a great deal more trouble over his personal appearance on this occasion than when he went to see his "Zuckerpüpp-

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chen," not because he liked Colibri better than Emilie but in the "pretty little doll" there was something enigmatic, something which stirred even the sluggish imagination of the young lieutenant.

### XIX

Madame Fritsche greeted him as she had done the day before and as though she had conspired with him in a plan of deception, informed him again that Emilie had gone out for a short time and asked him to wait. Kuzma Vassilyevitch nodded in token of assent and sat down on a chair. Madame Fritsche smiled again, that is, showed her yellow tusks and withdrew without offering him any chocolate.

Kuzma Vassilyevitch instantly fixed his eyes on the mysterious door. It remained closed. He coughed loudly once or twice so as to make known his presence. . . . The door did not stir. He held his breath, strained his ears. . . . He heard not the faintest sound or rustle; everything was still as death. Kuzma Vassilyevitch got up, approached the door on tiptoe and, fumbling in vain with his fingers, pressed his knee

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

against it. It was no use. Then he bent down and once or twice articulated in a loud whisper, "Colibri! Colibri! Little doll!" No one responded. Kuzma Vassilyevitch drew himself up, straightened his uniform—and, after standing still a little while, walked with more resolute steps to the window and began drumming on the pane. He began to feel vexed, indignant; his dignity as an officer began to assert itself. "What nonsense is this?" he thought at last; "whom do they take me for? If they go on like this, I'll knock with my fists. She will be forced to answer! The old woman will hear. . . . What of it? That's not my fault." He turned swiftly on his heel . . . the door stood half open.

### XX

Kuzma Vassilyevitch immediately hastened into the secret room again on tiptoe. Colibri was lying on the sofa in a white dress with a broad red sash. Covering the lower part of her face with a handkerchief, she was laughing, a noiseless but genuine laugh. She had done up her hair, this time plaiting it into two



## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

long, thick plaits intertwined with red ribbon; the same slippers adorned her tiny, crossed feet but the feet themselves were bare and looking at them one might fancy that she had on dark, silky stockings. The sofa stood in a different position, nearer the wall; and on the table he saw on a Chinese tray a bright-coloured, round-bellied coffee pot beside a cut glass sugar bowl and two blue China cups. The guitar was lying there, too, and blue-grey smoke rose in a thin coil from a big, aromatic candle.

Kuzma Vassilyevitch went up to the sofa and bent over Colibri, but before he had time to utter a word she held out her hand and, still laughing in her handkerchief, put her little, rough fingers into his hair and instantly ruffled the well-arranged curls on the top of his head.

"What next?" exclaimed Kuzma Vassilyevitch, not altogether pleased by such uncere-  
moniousness. "Oh, you naughty girl!"

Colibri took the handkerchief from her face.

"Not nice so; better now." She moved away to the further end of the sofa and drew her feet up under her. "Sit down . . . there."

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

Kuzma Vassilyevitch sat down on the spot indicated.

"Why do you move away?" he said, after a brief silence. "Surely you are not afraid of me?"

Colibri curled herself up and looked at him sideways.

"I am not afraid . . . no."

"You must not be shy with me," Kuzma Vassilyevitch said in an admonishing tone. "Do you remember your promise yesterday to give me a kiss?"

Colibri put her arms round her knees, laid her head on them and looked at him again.

"I remember."

"I should hope so. And you must keep your word."

"Yes . . . I must."

"In that case," Kuzma Vassilyevitch was beginning, and he moved nearer.

Colibri freed her plaits which she was holding tight with her knees and with one of them gave him a flick on his hand.

"Not so fast, sir!"

Kuzma Vassilyevitch was embarrassed.

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"What eyes she has, the rogue!" he muttered, as though to himself. "But," he went on, raising his voice, "why did you call me . . . if that is how it is?"

Colibri craned her neck like a bird . . . she listened. Kuzma Vassilyevitch was alarmed.

"Emilie?" he asked.

"No."

"Someone else?"

Colibri shrugged her shoulder.

"Do you hear something?"

"Nothing." With a birdlike movement, again Colibri drew back her little oval-shaped head with its pretty parting and the short growth of tiny curls on the nape of her neck where her plaits began, and again curled herself up into a ball. "Nothing."

"Nothing! Then now I'll . . ." Kuzma Vassilyevitch craned forward towards Colibri but at once pulled back his hand. There was a drop of blood on his finger. "What foolishness is this!" he cried, shaking his finger. "Your everlasting pins! And the devil of a pin it is!" he added, looking at the long, golden pin which Colibri slowly thrust into her sash.

## LIEUTENANT YERGUNOV'S STORY

"It's a regular dagger, it's a sting. . . . Yes, yes, it's your sting, and you are a wasp, that's what you are, a wasp, do you hear?"

Apparently Colibri was much pleased at Kuzma Vassilyevitch's comparison; she went off into a thin laugh and repeated several times over:

"Yes, I will sting . . . I will sting."

Kuzma Vassilyevitch looked at her and thought: "She is laughing but her face is melancholy.

"Look what I am going to show you," he said aloud.

"*Tso?*"

"Why do you say *tso*? Are you a Pole?"

"*Nee.*"

"Now you say *nee*! But there, it's no matter." Kuzma Vassilyevitch got out his present and waved it in the air. "Look at it. . . . Isn't it nice?"

Colibri raised her eyes indifferently.

"Ah! A cross! We don't wear."

"What? You don't wear a cross? Are you a Jewess then, or what?"

"We don't wear," repeated Colibri, and, sud-

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

denly starting, looked back over her shoulder. "Would you like me to sing?" she asked hurriedly.

Kuzma Vassilyevitch put the cross in the pocket of his uniform and he, too, looked round.

"What is it?" he muttered.

"A mouse . . . a mouse," Colibri said hurriedly, and suddenly to Kuzma Vassilyevitch's complete surprise, flung her smooth, supple arms round his neck and a rapid kiss burned his cheek . . . as though a red-hot ember had been pressed against it.

He pressed Colibri in his arms but she slipped away like a snake—her waist was hardly thicker than the body of a snake—and leapt to her feet.

"Wait," she whispered, "you must have some coffee first."

"Nonsense! Coffee, indeed! Afterwards."

"No, now. Now hot, after cold." She took hold of the coffee pot by the handle and, lifting it high, began pouring out two cups. The coffee fell in a thin, as it were, twirling stream;

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Colibri leaned her head on her shoulder and watched it fall. "There, put in the sugar . . . drink . . . and I'll drink."

Kuzma Vassilyevitch put a lump of sugar in the cup and drank it off at one draught. The coffee struck him as very strong and bitter. Colibri looked at him, smiling, and faintly dilated her nostrils over the edge of her cup. She slowly put it down on the table.

"Why don't you drink it?" asked Kuzma Vassilyevitch.

"Not all, now."

Kuzma Vassilyevitch got excited.

"Do sit down beside me, at least."

"In a minute." She bent her head and, still keeping her eyes fixed on Kuzma Vassilyevitch, picked up the guitar. "Only I will sing first."

"Yes, yes, only sit down."

"And I will dance. Shall I?"

"You dance? Well, I should like to see that. But can't that be afterwards?"

"No, now. . . . But I love you very much."

"You love? Mind now . . . dance away, then, you queer creature."

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

### XXI

Colibri stood on the further side of the table and running her fingers several times over the strings of the guitar and to the surprise of Kuzma Vassilyevitch, who was expecting a lively, merry song, began singing a slow, monotonous air, accompanying each separate sound, which seemed as though it were wrung out of her by force, with a rhythmical swaying of her body to right and left. She did not smile, and indeed knitted her brows, her delicate, high, rounded eyebrows, between which a dark blue mark, probably burnt in with gunpowder, stood out sharply, looking like some letter of an oriental alphabet. She almost closed her eyes but their pupils glimmered dimly under the drooping lids, fastened as before on Kuzma Vassilyevitch. And he, too, could not look away from those marvellous, menacing eyes, from that dark-skinned face that gradually began to glow, from the half-closed and motionless lips, from the two black snakes rhythmically moving on both sides of her graceful head. Colibri went on swaying without

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moving from the spot and only her feet were working; she kept lightly shifting them, lifting first the toe and then the heel. Once she rotated rapidly and uttered a piercing shriek, waving the guitar high in the air. . . . Then the same monotonous movement accompanied by the same monotonous singing, began again. Kuzma Vassilyevitch sat meanwhile very quietly on the sofa and went on looking at Colibri; he felt something strange and unusual in himself: he was conscious of great lightness and freedom, too great lightness, in fact; he seemed, as it were, unconscious of his body, as though he were floating and at the same time shudders ran down him, a sort of agreeable weakness crept over his legs, and his lips and eyelids tingled with drowsiness. He had no desire now, no thought of anything . . . only he was wonderfully at ease, as though someone were lulling him, "singing him to bye-bye," as Emilie had expressed it, and he whispered to himself, "little doll!" At times the face of the "little doll" grew misty. "Why is that?" Kuzma Vassilyevitch wondered. "From the smoke," he reassured himself. "There is such



## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

a blue smoke here." And again someone was lulling him and even whispering in his ear something so sweet . . . only for some reason it was always unfinished. But then all of a sudden in the little doll's face the eyes opened till they were immense, incredibly big, like the arches of a bridge. . . . The guitar dropped, and striking against the floor, clanged somewhere at the other end of the earth. . . . Some very near and dear friend of Kuzma Vassilyevitch's embraced him firmly and tenderly from behind and set his cravat straight. Kuzma Vassilyevitch saw just before his own face the hooked nose, the thick moustache and the piercing eyes of the stranger with the three buttons on his cuff . . . and although the eyes were in the place of the moustache and the nose itself seemed upside down, Kuzma Vassilyevitch was not in the least surprised, but, on the contrary, thought that this was how it ought to be; he was even on the point of saying to the nose, "Hullo, brother Grigory," but he changed his mind and preferred . . . preferred to set off with Colibri to Constantinople at once for their

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forthcoming wedding, as she was a Turk and the Tsar promoted him to be an actual Turk.

### XXII

And opportunely a little boat appeared: he lifted his foot to get into it and though through clumsiness he stumbled and hurt himself rather badly, so that for some time he did not know where anything was, yet he managed it and getting into the boat, floated on the big river, which, as the River of Time, flows to Constantinople in the map on the walls of the Nikolaevsky High School. With great satisfaction he floated down the river and watched a number of red ducks which continually met him; they would not let him come near them, however, and, diving, changed into round, pink spots. And Colibri was going with him, too, but to escape the sultry heat she hid under the boat and from time to time knocked on the bottom of it. . . . And here at last was Constantinople. The houses, as houses should, looked like Tyrolese hats; and the Turks had all big, sedate faces; only it did not do to look

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at them too long: they began wriggling, making faces and at last melted away altogether like thawing snow. And here was the palace in which he would live with Colibri. . . . And how well everything was arranged in it! Walls with generals' gold lace on it, everywhere epaulettes, people blowing trumpets in the corners and one could float into the drawing-room in the boat. Of course, there was a portrait of Mahomet. . . . Only Colibri kept running ahead through the rooms and her plaits trailed after her on the floor and she would not turn round, and she kept growing smaller and smaller. . . . And now it was not Colibri but a boy in a jacket and he was the boy's tutor and he had to climb after the boy into a telescope, and the telescope got narrower and narrower, till at last he could not move . . . neither backwards nor forwards, and something fell on his back . . . there was earth in his mouth.

## XXIII

Kuzma Vassilyevitch opened his eyes. It was daylight and everything was still . . . there was a smell of vinegar and mint. Above

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him and at his sides there was something white; he looked more intently: it was the canopy of a bed. He wanted to raise his head . . . he could not; his hand . . . he could not do that, either. What was the meaning of it? He dropped his eyes. . . . A long body lay stretched before him and over it a yellow blanket with a brown edge. The body proved to be his, Kuzma Vassilyevitch's. He tried to cry out . . . no sound came. He tried again, did his very utmost . . . there was the sound of a feeble moan quavering under his nose. He heard heavy footsteps and a sinewy hand parted the bed curtains. A grey-headed pensioner in a patched military overcoat stood gazing at him. . . . And he gazed at the pensioner. A big tin mug was put to Kuzma Vassilyevitch's lips. He greedily drank some cold water. His tongue was loosened. "Where am I?" The pensioner glanced at him once more, went away and came back with another man in a dark uniform. "Where am I?" repeated Kuzma Vassilyevitch. "Well, he will live now," said the man in the dark uniform. "You are in the hospital," he added aloud, "but you

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must go to sleep. It is bad for you to talk." Kuzma Vassilyevitch began to feel surprised, but sank into forgetfulness again. . . .

Next morning the doctor appeared. Kuzma Vassilyevitch came to himself. The doctor congratulated him on his recovery and ordered the bandages round his head to be changed.

"What? My head? Why, am I . . ."

"You mustn't talk, you mustn't excite yourself," the doctor interrupted. "Lie still and thank the Almighty. Where **are** the compresses, Poplyovkin?"

"But where is the money . . . the government money . . ."

"There! He is lightheaded again. Some more ice, Poplyovkin."

## XXIV

Another week passed. Kuzma Vassilyevitch was so much better that the doctors found it possible to tell him what had happened to him. This is what he learned.

At seven o'clock in the evening on the 16th of June he had visited the house of Madame Fritsche for the last time and on the 17th of

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June at dinner time, that is, nearly twenty-four hours later, a shepherd had found him in a ravine near the Herson high road, a mile and a half from Nikolaev, with a broken head and crimson bruises on his neck. His uniform and waistcoat had been unbuttoned, all his pockets turned inside out, his cap and cutlass were not to be found, nor his leather money belt. From the trampled grass, from the broad track upon the grass and the clay, it could be inferred that the luckless lieutenant had been dragged to the bottom of the ravine and only there had been gashed on his head, not with an axe but with a sabre—probably his own cutlass: there were no traces of blood on his track from the high road while there was a perfect pool of blood round his head. There could be no doubt that his assailants had first drugged him, then tried to strangle him and, taking him out of the town by night, had dragged him to the ravine **and there given him the final blow.** It was only thanks to his truly iron constitution that Kuzma Vassilyevitch had not died. He had returned to consciousness on July 22nd, that is, five weeks later.

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### XXV

Kuzma Vassilyevitch immediately informed the authorities of the misfortune that had happened to him; he stated all the circumstances of the case verbally and in writing and gave the address of Madame Fritsche. The police raided the house but they found no one there; the birds had flown. They got hold of the owner of the house. But they could not get much sense out of the latter, a very old and deaf workman. He lived in a different part of the town and all he knew was that four months before he had let his house to a Jewess with a passport, whose name was Schmul or Schmulke, which he had immediately registered at the police station. She had been joined by another woman, so he stated, who also had a passport, but what was their calling did not know; and whether they had other people living with them had not heard and did not know; the lad whom he used to keep as porter or watchman in the house had gone away to Odessa or Petersburg, and the new porter had only lately come, on the 1st of July.

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Inquiries were made at the police station and in the neighbourhood; it appeared that Madame Schmulke, together with her companion, whose real name was Frederika Bengel, had left Nikolaev about the 20th of June, but where they had gone was unknown. The mysterious man with a gipsy face and three buttons on his cuff and the dark-skinned foreign girl with an immense mass of hair, no one had seen. As soon as Kuzma Vassilyevitch was discharged from the hospital, he visited the house that had been so fateful for him. In the little room where he had talked to Colibri and where there was still a smell of musk, there was a second secret door; the sofa had been moved in front of it on his second visit and through it no doubt the murderer had come and seized him from behind. Kuzma Vassilyevitch lodged a formal complaint; proceedings were taken. Several numbered reports and instructions were dispatched in various directions; the appropriate acknowledgments and replies followed in due course. . . . There the incident closed. The suspicious characters had disappeared completely and with them the stolen government



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money had vanished, too, one thousand, nine hundred and seventeen roubles and some kopecks, in paper and gold. Not an inconsiderable sum in those days! Kuzma Vassilyevitch was paying back instalments for ten years, when, fortunately for him, an act of clemency from the Throne cancelled the debt.

### XXVI

He was himself at first firmly convinced that Emilie, his treacherous Zuckerpüppchen, was to blame for all his trouble and had originated the plot. He remembered how on the last day he had seen her he had incautiously dropped asleep on the sofa and how when he woke he had found her on her knees beside him and how confused she had been, and how he had found a hole in his belt that evening—a hole evidently made by her scissors. "She saw the money," thought Kuzma Vassilyevitch, "she told the old hag and those other two devils, she entrapped me by writing me that letter . . . and so they cleaned me out. But who could have expected it of her!" He pictured

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the pretty, good-natured face of Emilie, her clear eyes. . . . "Women! women!" he repeated, gnashing his teeth, "brood of crocodiles!" But when he had finally left the hospital and gone home, he learned one circumstance which perplexed and nonplussed him. On the very day when he was brought half dead to the town, a girl whose description corresponded exactly to that of Emilie had rushed to his lodging with tear-stained face and dishevelled hair and inquiring about him from his orderly, had dashed off like mad to the hospital. At the hospital she had been told that Kuzma Vassilyevitch would certainly die and she had at once disappeared, wringing her hands with a look of despair on her face. It was evident that she had not foreseen, had not expected the murder. Or perhaps she had herself been deceived and had not received her promised share? Had she been overwhelmed by sudden remorse? And yet she had left Nikolaev afterwards with that loathsome old woman who had certainly known all about it. Kuzma Vassilyevitch was lost in conjecture and bored his or-

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derly a good deal by making him continually describe over and over again the appearance of the girl and repeat her words.

### XXVII

A year and a half later Kuzma Vassilyevitch received a letter in German from Emilie, *alias* Frederika Bengel, which he promptly had translated for him and showed us more than once in later days. It was full of mistakes in spelling and exclamation marks; the postmark on the envelope was Breslau. Here is the translation, as correct as may be, of the letter:

"My precious, unforgettable and incomparable Florestan! Mr. Lieutenant Yergenhof!

"How often I felt impelled to write to you! And I have always unfortunately put it off, though the thought that you may regard me as having had a hand in that awful crime has always been the most appalling thought to me! Oh, dear Mr. Lieutenant! Believe me, the day when I learnt that you were alive and well, was the happiest day of my life! But I do not mean to justify myself altogether! I will not tell a lie! I was the first to discover your

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habit of carrying your money round your waist! (Though indeed in our part of the world all the butchers and meat salesmen do the same!) And I was so incautious as to let drop a word about it! I even said in joke that it wouldn't be bad to take a little of your money! But the old wretch (Mr. Florestan! she was *not* my aunt) plotted with that godless monster Luigi and his accomplice! I swear by my mother's tomb, I don't know to this day who those people were! I only know that his name was Luigi and that they both came from Bucharest and were certainly great criminals and were hiding from the police and had money and precious things! Luigi was a dreadful individual (*ein schröckliches Subject*), to kill a fellow-man (*einen Mitmenschen*) meant nothing at all to him! He spoke every language—and it was *he* who that time got our things back from the cook! \Don't ask how! He was capable of anything, he was an awful man! He assured the old woman that he would only drug you a little and then take you out of town and put you down somewhere and would say that he knew nothing about it but that it

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was your fault—that you had taken too much wine somewhere! But even then the wretch had it in his mind that it would be better to kill you so that there would be no one to tell the tale! He wrote you that letter, signed with my name and the old woman got me away by craft! I suspected nothing and I was awfully afraid of Luigi! He used to say to me, ‘I’ll cut your throat, I’ll cut your throat like a chicken’s!’ And he used to twitch his moustache so horribly as he said it! And they dragged me into a bad company, too. . . . I am very much ashamed, Mr. Lieutenant! And even now I shed bitter tears at these memories! . . . It seems to me . . . ah! I was not born for such doings. . . . But there is no help for it; and this is how it all happened! Afterwards I was horribly frightened and could not help going away, for if the police had found us, what would have happened to us then? That accursed Luigi fled at once as soon as he heard that you were alive. But I soon parted from them all and though now I am often without a crust of bread, my heart is at peace! You will ask me perhaps why I

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came to Nikolaev? But I can give you no answer! I have sworn! I will finish by asking of you a favour, a very, very important one: whenever you remember your little friend Emilie, do not think of her as a black-hearted criminal! The eternal God sees my heart. I have a bad morality (*Ich habe eine schlechte moralität*) and I am feather-headed, but I am not a criminal. And I shall always love and remember you, my incomparable Florestan, and shall always wish you everything good on this earthly globe (*auf diesem Erdenrund!*). I don't know whether my letter will reach you, but if it does, write me a few lines that I may see you have received it. Thereby you will make very happy your ever-devoted Emilie.

"P. S. Write to F. E. poste restante, Breslau, Silesia.

"P. S. S. I have written to you in German; I could not express my feelings otherwise; but you write to me in Russian.

### XXVIII

"Well, did you answer her?" we asked Kuzma Vassilyevitch.

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"I meant to, I meant to many times. But how was I to write? I don't know German . . . and in Russian, who would have translated it? And so I did not write."

And always as he finished his story, Kuzma Vassilyevitch sighed, shook his head and said, "that's what it is to be young!" And if among his audience was some new person who was hearing the famous story for the first time, he would take his hand, lay it on his skull and make him feel the scar of the wound. . . . It really was a fearful wound and the scar reached from one ear to the other.

1867.

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"BUT if one admits the possibility of the supernatural, the possibility of its participation in real life, then allow me to ask what becomes of 'common sense?'" Anton Stepanitch pronounced and he folded his arms over his stomach.

Anton Stepanitch had the grade of a civil councillor, served in some incomprehensible department and, speaking emphatically and stiffly in a bass voice, enjoyed universal respect. He had not long before, in the words of those who envied him, "had the Stanislav stuck on to him."

"That's perfectly true," observed Skvorevitch.

"No one will dispute that," added Kinarevitch.

"I am of the same opinion," the master of the house, Finoplentov, chimed in from the corner in falsetto.



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"Well, I must confess, I cannot agree, for something supernatural has happened to me myself," said a bald, corpulent middle-aged gentleman of medium height, who had till then sat silent behind the stove. The eyes of all in the room turned to him with curiosity and surprise, and there was a silence.

The man was a Kaluga landowner of small means who had lately come to Petersburg. He had once served in the Hussars, had lost money at cards, had resigned his commission and had settled in the country. The recent economic reforms had reduced his income and he had come to the capital to look out for a suitable berth. He had no qualifications and no connections, but he confidently relied on the friendship of an old comrade who had suddenly, for no visible reason, become a person of importance, and whom he had once helped in thrashing a card sharper. Moreover, he reckoned on his luck—and it did not fail him: a few days after his arrival in town he received the post of superintendent of government warehouses, a profitable and even honourable position, which did not call for conspicuous abilities: the ware-

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houses themselves had only a hypothetical existence and indeed it was not very precisely known with what they were to be filled—but they had been invented with a view to government economy.

Anton Stepanitch was the first to break the silence.

“What, my dear sir,” he began, “do you seriously maintain that something supernatural has happened to you? I mean to say, something inconsistent with the laws of nature?”

“I do maintain it,” replied the gentleman addressed as “My dear sir,” whose name was Porfiry Kapitonitch.

“Inconsistent with the laws of nature!” Anton Stepanitch repeated angrily; apparently he liked the phrase.

“Just so . . . yes; it was precisely what you say.”

“That’s amazing! What do you think of it, gentlemen?” Anton Stepanitch tried to give his features an ironical expression, but without effect—or to speak more accurately, merely with the effect of suggesting that the dignified civil councillor had detected an unpleasant

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smell. "Might we trouble you, dear sir," he went on, addressing the Kaluga landowner, "to give us the details of so interesting an incident?"

"Certainly, why not?" answered the landowner and, moving in a free-and-easy way to the middle of the room, he spoke as follows:

"I have, gentlemen, as you are probably aware, or perhaps are not aware, a small estate in the Kozelsky district. In old days I used to get something out of it, though now, of course, I have nothing to look forward to but unpleasantness. But enough of politics. Well, in that district I have a little place: the usual kitchen garden, a little pond with carp in it, farm buildings of a sort and a little lodge for my own sinful person . . . I am a bachelor. Well, one day—some six years ago—I came home rather late; I had had a game of cards at a neighbour's and I was—I beg you to note—the least little bit elevated, as they say; I undressed, got into bed and put out the candle. And only fancy, gentlemen: as soon as I put out the candle there was something moving under my bed! I wondered whether it was a rat;

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no, it was not a rat: it moved about, scratched on the floor and scratched itself. . . . At last it flapped its ears!

"There was no mistake about it; it was a dog. But where could a dog have come from? I did not keep one; could some stray dog have run in, I wondered. I called my servant; Filka was his name. He came in with a candle.

"‘How’s this,’ I said, ‘Filka, my lad? Is that how you look after things? A dog has got under my bed?’ ‘What dog?’ said he. ‘How do I know,’ said I, ‘that’s your business—to save your master from disturbance.’ My Filka bent down, and began moving the candle under the bed. ‘But there’s no dog here,’ said he. I bent down, too; there certainly was no dog there. What a queer thing!—I glanced at Filka and he was smiling. ‘You stupid,’ I said to him, ‘why are you grinning. When you opened the door the dog must have whisked out into the passage. And you, gaping idiot, saw nothing because you are always asleep. You don’t suppose I am drunk, do

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you?' He would have answered, but I sent him out, curled up and that night heard nothing more.

"But the next night—only fancy—the thing was repeated. As soon as I blew out the candle, he scratched himself and flapped his ears again. Again I called Filka; again he looked under the bed—again there was nothing! I sent him away, blew out the candle—and, damn it all, the dog was there again and it was a dog right enough: one could hear it breathing, biting its coat, looking for fleas. . . . It was so distinct—'Filka,' I said, 'come here without the candle!' He came in. 'Well, now,' I said, 'do you hear?' 'Yes,' he said. I could not see him, but I felt that the fellow was scared. 'What do you make of it?' said I. 'What do you bid me make of it, Porfiry Kapitonitch? It's sorcery!' 'You are a foolish fellow,' I said, 'hold your tongue with your sorcery. . . .' And our voices quavered like a bird's and we were trembling in the dark as though we were in a fever. I lighted a candle, no dog, no sound, only us two, as white as chalk. So I kept a candle burning till morning and I assure

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you, gentlemen, you may believe me or you may not, but from that night for six weeks the same thing was repeated. In the end I actually got used to it and began putting out the candle, because I couldn't get to sleep in the light. 'Let him fidget,' I thought, 'he doesn't do me any harm.' "

"Well, I see you are not one of the chicken-hearted brigade," Anton Stepanitch interrupted in a half-contemptuous, half-condescending tone! "One can see the Hussar at once!"

"I shouldn't be afraid of you in any case," Porfiry Kapitonitch observed, and for an instant he really did look like a Hussar.

"But listen to the rest. A neighbour came to see me, the very one with whom I used to play cards. He dined with me on what luck provided and dropped some fifty roubles for his visit; night came on, it was time for him to be off. But I had my own idea. 'Stay the night with me,' I said, 'Vassily Vassilitch; tomorrow, please God, you will win it back.' Vassily Vassilitch considered and stayed. I had a bed put up for him in my room. . . . Well, we went to bed, smoked, chatted—about

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the fair sex for the most part, as is only suitable in bachelor company—we laughed, of course; I saw Vassily Vassilitch put out his candle and turn his back towards me: as much as to say: ‘Good night.’ I waited a little, then I, too, put out my candle. And, only fancy, I had hardly time to wonder what sort of trick would be played this time, when the sweet creature was moving again. And moving was not all; it came out from under the bed, walked across the room, tapped on the floor with its paws, shook its ears and all of a sudden pushed against the very chair that was close by Vassily Vassilitch’s bed. ‘Porfiry Kapitonitch,’ said the latter, and in such an unconcerned voice, you know, ‘I did not know you had a dog. What sort is it, a setter?’ ‘I haven’t a dog,’ I said, ‘and never have had one!’ ‘You haven’t? Why, what’s this?’ ‘What’s *this*?’ said I, ‘why, light the candle and then you will see for yourself.’ ‘Isn’t it a dog?’ ‘No.’ Vassily Vassilitch turned over in bed. ‘But you are joking, dash it all.’ ‘No, I am not joking.’ I heard him go strike, strike, with a match, while the creature persisted in scratching its ribs. The light flared

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up . . . and, hey presto! not a trace remained! Vassily Vassilitch looked at me and I looked at him. 'What trick is this?' he said. 'It's a trick,' I said, 'that, if you were to set Socrates himself on one side and Frederick the Great on the other, even they could not make it out.' And then I told him all about it. Didn't my Vassily Vassilitch jump out of bed! As though he had been scalded! He couldn't get into his boots. 'Horses,' he cried, 'horses!' I began trying to persuade him, but it was no use! He positively gasped! 'I won't stay,' he said, 'not a minute! You must be a man under a curse! Horses.' However, I prevailed upon him. Only his bed was dragged into another room and nightlights were lighted everywhere. At our tea in the morning he had regained his equanimity; he began to give me advice. 'You should try being away from home for a few days, Porfiry Kapitonitch,' he said, 'perhaps this abomination would leave you.' And I must tell you: my neighbour was a man of immense intellect. He managed his mother-in-law wonderfully: he fastened an I. O. U. upon her; he must have chosen a sentimental moment! She became as



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soft as silk, she gave him an authorisation for the management of all her estate—what more would you have? You know it is something to get the better of one's mother-in-law. Eh! You can judge for yourselves. However, he took leave of me in some displeasure; I'd stripped him of a hundred roubles again. He actually abused me. 'You are ungrateful,' he said, 'you have no feeling'; but how was I to blame? Well, be that as it may, I considered his advice. That very day I drove off to the town and put up at an inn, kept by an old man I knew, a Dissenter. He was a worthy old fellow, though a little morose from living in solitude, all his family were dead. But he disliked tobacco and had the greatest loathing for dogs; I believe he would have been torn to pieces rather than consent to let a dog into his room. 'For how can one?' he would say, 'the Queen of Heaven herself is graciously pleased to be on my wall there, and is an unclean dog to put his infidel nose there?' Of course, it was lack of education! However, to my thinking, whatever wisdom a man has he had better stick to that."

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"I see you are a great philosopher," Anton Stepanitch interrupted a second time with the same sarcastic smile.

This time Porfiry Kapitonitch actually frowned.

"How much I know of philosophy I cannot tell," he observed, tugging grimly at his moustache, "but I would be glad to give you a lesson in it."

We all simply stared at Anton Stepanitch. Every one of us expected a haughty reply, or at least a glance like a flash of lightning. . . . But the civil councillor turned his contemptuous smile into one of indifference, then yawned, swung his foot and—that was all!

"Well, I stayed at that old fellow's," Porfiry Kapitonitch went on. "He gave me a little room, not one of the best, as we were old friends; his own was close by, the other side of the partition—and that was just what I wanted. The tortures I faced that night! A little room, a regular oven, stuffiness, flies, and such sticky ones; in the corner an extraordinarily big shrine with ancient ikons, with dingy setting in relief on them. It fairly reeked of

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oil and some other stuff, too; there were two featherbeds on the beds. If you moved the pillow a black beetle would run from under it. . . . I had drunk an incredible quantity of tea, feeling so dreary—it was simply dreadful! I got into bed; there was no possibility of sleeping—and, the other side of the partition, my host was sighing, clearing his throat, repeating his prayers. However, he subsided at last. I heard him begin to snore, but only faintly, in the old-fashioned polite way. I had put my candle out long ago, but the little lamp was burning before the ikons. . . . That prevented it, I suppose. So I got up softly with bare feet, climbed up to the lamp, and blew it out. . . . Nothing happened. ‘Oho!’ I thought, ‘so it doesn’t come off in other people’s houses.’

“But I had no sooner got into bed than there was a commotion again. He was scraping on the floor and scratching himself and shaking his ears . . . the usual thing, in fact. Very good! I lay still and waited to see what would happen. I heard the old man wake up. ‘Sir,’ he said, ‘hey, sir.’ ‘What is

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it?' 'Did you put out the lamp?' But without waiting for my answer, he burst out all at once. 'What's that? What's that, a dog? A dog! Ah, you vile heretic!' 'Wait a bit, old man, before you scold,' I said. 'You had better come here yourself. Things are happening,' I said, 'that may well make you wonder.' The old man stirred behind the partition and came in to me, with a candle, a very, very thin one, made of yellow wax; I was surprised when I looked at him! He looked bristling all over, with hairy ears and eyes as fierce as a weasel's; he had on a white woollen night cap, a beard to his waist, white, too, and a waistcoat with copper buttons on it over his shirt and fur boots on his feet and he smelt of Jursiper. In this attire he approached the ikons, crossed himself three times with his two fingers crossed, lighted the lamp, crossed himself again and, turning to me, just grunted: 'Explain!' And there, without delay, I told him all that had happened. The old man listened to my account and did not drop one word, simply shook his head. Then he sat down on my bed and still said nothing. He scratched his chest, the

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back of his head and so on and said nothing. 'Well,' I said, 'Fedul Ivanitch, what do you think? Is it some devil's sorcery or what?' The old man looked at me. 'What an idea! Devil's sorcery! A tobacco-smoker like you might well have that at home, but not here. Only think what holiness there is here! Sorcery, indeed!' 'And if it is not sorcery, what is it, then?' The old man was silent again; again he scratched himself and said at last, but in a muffled voice, for his moustache was all over his mouth: 'You go to the town of Belyov. There is no one who can help you but one man. And that man lives in Belyov. He is one of our people. If he is willing to help you, you are lucky; if he is not, nothing can be done.' 'And how am I to find this man?' I said. 'I can direct you about that,' he answered; 'but how can it be sorcery? It is an apparition, or rather an indication, but you cannot comprehend it, it is beyond your understanding.' Lie down to sleep now with the blessing of our Lord Christ. I will burn incense and in the morning we will converse. Morning, you know, brings wisdom.

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"Well, we did converse in the morning, only I was almost stifled by that incense. And this was the counsel the old man gave me: that when I reached Belyov I should go into the market place and ask in the second shop on the right for one Prohoritch, and when I had found Prohoritch, put into his hand a writing and the writing consisted of a scrap of paper, on which stood the following words: 'In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen. To Sergey Prohorovitch Per-vushin. Trust this man. Feduly Ivanitch.' And below, 'Send the cabbages, for God's sake.'

"I thanked the old man and without further discussion ordered my carriage and drove to Belyov. For I reflected, that though I suffered no harm from my nocturnal visitor, yet it was uncanny and in fact not quite the thing for a nobleman and an officer—what do you think?"

"And did you really go to Belyov?" murmured Finoplentov.

"Straight to Belyov. I went into the market place and asked at the second shop on the right for Prohoritch. 'Is there such a person?' I asked. 'Yes,' they told me. 'And where does

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he live?' 'By the Oka, beyond the market gardens.' 'In whose house?' 'In his own.' I went to the Oka, found his house, though it was really not a house but simply a hovel. I saw a man wearing a blue patched coat and a ragged cap, well . . . he looked like a working-man, he was standing with his back to me, digging among his cabbages. I went up to him. 'Are you so and so?' I said. He turned round and, I tell you the truth, I have never seen such piercing eyes in my life. Yet the whole face was shrunk up like a little fist with a little wedge-shaped beard and sunken lips. He was an old man. 'I am so and so,' he said. 'What are you *needing*?' 'Why, this is what I am *needing*,' I said, and put the writing in his hand. He looked at me intently and said: 'Come indoors, I can't read without spectacles.'

"Well, I went with him into his hut—and a hut it certainly was: poor, bare, crooked; only just holding together. On the wall there was an ikon of old workmanship as black as a coal; only the whites of the eyes gleamed in the faces. He took some round spectacles in iron frames out of a little table, put them on his

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nose, read the writing and looked at me again through the spectacles. 'You have need of me?' 'I certainly have,' I answered. 'Well,' said he, 'if you have, tell it and we will listen.' And, only fancy, he sat down and took a checked handkerchief out of his pocket, and spread it out on his knee, and the handkerchief was full of holes, and he looked at me with as much dignity as though he were a senator or a minister, and he did not ask me to sit down. And what was still stranger, I felt all at once awe-stricken, so awe-stricken . . . my soul sank into my heels. He pierced me through with his eyes and that's the fact! I pulled myself together, however, and told him all my story. He was silent for a space, shrank into himself, chewed his lips and then questioned me just like a senator again, majestically, without haste. 'What is your name?' he asked. 'Your age? What were your parents? Are you single or married?' Then again he munched his lips, frowned, held up his finger and spoke: 'Bow down to the holy ikon, to the honourable Saints Zossima and Savvaty of Solovki.' I bowed down to the earth and did not get up



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in a hurry; I felt such awe for the man and such submission that I believe that whatever he had told me to do I should have done it on the spot! . . . I see you are grinning, gentlemen, but I was in no laughing mood then, I assure you. 'Get up, sir,' said he at last. 'I can help you. This is not sent you as a chastisement, but as a warning; it is for your protection; someone is praying for your welfare. Go to the market now and buy a young dog and keep it by you day and night. Your visions will leave you and, moreover, that dog will be of use to you.'

"I felt as though light dawned upon me, all at once; how those words delighted me. I bowed down to Prohoritch and would have gone away, when I bethought me that I could not go away without rewarding him. I got a three rouble note out of my pocket. But he thrust my hand away and said, 'Give it to our chapel, or to the poor; the service I have done you is not to be paid for.' I bowed down to him again almost to the ground, and set off straight for the market! And only fancy: as soon as I drew near the shops, lo and

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behold, a man in a frieze overcoat comes sauntering towards me carrying under his arm a two months' old setter puppy with a reddish brown coat, white lips and white forepaws. 'Stay,' I said to the man in the overcoat, 'what will you sell it for?' 'For two roubles.' 'Take three!' The man looked at me in amazement, thought the gentleman had gone out of his wits, but I flung the notes in his face, took the pup under my arm and made for my carriage! The coachman quickly had the horses harnessed and that evening I reached home. The puppy sat inside my coat all the way and did not stir; and I kept calling him, 'Little Trésor! Little Trésor!' I gave him food and drink at once. I had some straw brought in, settled him and whisked into bed! I blew out the candle: it was dark. 'Well, now begin,' said I. There was silence. 'Begin,' said I, 'you so and so!' . . . Not a sound, as though to mock me. Well, I began to feel so set up that I fell to calling it all sorts of names. But still there was not a sound! I could only hear the puppy panting! 'Filka,' I cried, 'Filka! Come here, you stupid!' He came in. 'Do you hear the

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dog?' 'No, sir,' said he, 'I hear nothing,' and he laughed. 'And you won't hear it ever again,' said I. 'Here's half a rouble for vodka!' 'Let me kiss your hand,' said the foolish fellow, and he stooped down to me in the darkness. . . . It was a great relief, I must tell you."

"And was that how it all ended?' asked Anton Stepanitch, this time without irony.

"The apparitions ended certainly and I was not disturbed in any way, but wait a bit, the whole business was not over yet. My Trésor grew, he turned into a fine fellow. He was heavy, with flopping ears and overhanging lip and a thick tail; a regular sporting dog. And he was extremely attached to me, too. The shooting in our district is poor, however, as I had set up a dog, I got a gun, too. I took to sauntering round the neighbourhood with my Trésor: sometimes one would hit a hare (and didn't he go after that hare, upon my soul), sometimes a quail, or a duck. But the great thing was that Trésor was never a step away from me. Where I went, he went; I even took him to the bath with me, I did really! One lady actually tried to get me turned out of her

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drawing-room on account of Trésor, but I made such an uproar! The windows I broke! Well, one day . . . it was in summer . . . and I must tell you there was a drought at the time such as nobody remembered. The air was full of smoke or haze. There was a smell of burning, the sun was like a molten bullet, and as for the dust there was no getting it out of one's nose and throat. People walked with their mouths wide open like crows. I got weary of sitting at home in complete deshabelle, with shutters closed; and luckily the heat was beginning to abate a little. . . . So I went off, gentlemen, to see a lady, a neighbour of mine. She lived about three-quarters of a mile away—and she certainly was a benevolent lady. She was still young and blooming and of most prepossessing appearance; but she was of rather uncertain temper. Though that is no harm in the fair sex; it even gives me pleasure. . . . Well, I reached her door, and I did feel that I had had a hot time of it getting there! Well, I thought, Nimfodora Semyonovna will regale me now with bilberry water and other cooling drinks—and I had already taken hold of the

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doorhandle when all at once there was the tramping of feet and shrieking, and shouting of boys from round the corner of a hut in the courtyard. . . . I looked round. Good heavens! A huge reddish beast was rushing straight towards me; at the first glance I did not recognise it as a dog: its jaws were open, its eyes were bloodshot, its coat was bristling. . . . I had not time to take breath before the monster bounded up the steps, stood upon its hind legs and made straight for my chest—it was a position! I was numb with terror and could not lift my arms. I was completely stupefied. . . . I could see nothing but the terrible white tusks just before my nose, the red tongue all covered with white foam. But at the same instant, another dark body was whisking before me like a ball—it was my darling Trésor defending me; and he hung like a leech on the brute's throat! The creature wheezed, grated its teeth and staggered back. I instantly flung open the door and got into the hall. . . . I stood hardly knowing what I was doing with my whole weight on the door, and heard a desperate battle going on outside. I began

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shouting and calling for help; everyone in the house was terribly upset. Nimfodora Semyonovna ran out with her hair down, the voices in the yard grew louder—and all at once I heard: ‘Hold the gate, hold it, fasten it!’ I opened the door—just a crack, and looked out: the monster was no longer on the steps, the servants were rushing about the yard in confusion, waving their hands and picking up bits of wood from the ground; they were quite crazy. ‘To the village, it has run off to the village,’ shrieked a peasant woman in a cap of extraordinary size poking her head out of a dormer window. I went out of the house.

“‘Where is my Trésor?’ I asked and at once I saw my saviour. He was coming from the gate limping, covered with wounds and with blood. . . . ‘What’s the meaning of it?’ I asked the servants who were dashing about the yard as though possessed. ‘A mad dog!’ they answered, ‘the count’s; it’s been hanging about here since yesterday.’

“We had a neighbour, a count, who bred very fierce foreign dogs. My knees shook; I rushed to a looking-glass and looked to see whether I

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had been bitten. No, thank God, there was nothing to be seen; only my countenance naturally looked green; while Nimfodora Semyonovna was lying on the sofa and cackling like a hen. Well, that one could quite understand, in the first place nerves, in the second sensibility. She came to herself at last, though, and asked me whether I were alive. I answered that I was and that Trésor had saved me. 'Ah,' she said, 'what a noble creature! and so the mad dog has strangled him?' 'No,' I said, 'it has not strangled him, but has wounded him seriously.' 'Oh,' she said, 'in that case he must be shot this minute!' 'Oh, no,' I said, 'I won't agree to that. I shall try to cure him. . . .' At that moment Trésor began scratching at the door. I was about to go and open it for him. 'Oh,' she said, 'what are you doing, why, it will bite us all.' 'Upon my word,' I said, 'the poison does not act so quickly.' 'Oh, how can you?' she said. 'Why, you have taken leave of your senses!' 'Nimfotchka,' I said, 'calm yourself, be reasonable. . . .' But she suddenly cried, 'Go away at once with your horrid dog.' 'I will go away,' said I. 'At once,' she

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said, 'this second! Get along with you,' she said, 'you villain, and never dare to let me set eyes on you again. You may go mad yourself!' 'Very good,' said I, 'only let me have a carriage for I am afraid to go home on foot now.' 'Give him the carriage, the coach, the chaise, what he likes, only let him be gone quickly. Oh, what eyes! Oh, what eyes he has!' and with those words she whisked out of the room and gave a maid who met her a slap in the face—and I heard her in hysterics again.

"And you may not believe me, gentlemen, but that very day I broke off all acquaintance with Nimfodora Semyonovna; on mature consideration of everything, I am bound to add that for that circumstance, too, I shall owe a debt of gratitude to my friend Trésor to the hour of my death.

"Well, I had the carriage brought round, put my Trésor in and drove home. When I got home I looked him over and washed his wounds, and thought I would take him next day as soon as it was light to the wise man in the Yefremovsky district. And this wise man was an old peasant, a wonderful man:



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he would whisper over some water—and some people made out that he dropped some snake spittle into it—would give it as a draught, and the trouble would be gone completely. I thought, by the way, I would be bled myself at Yefremovo: it's a good thing as a precaution against fright, only not from the arm, of course, but from the falcon."

"What place is that, the falcon?" Mr. Fimoplentov asked with demure curiosity.

"Why, don't you know? It is here on the fist near the thumb, the spot on which one shakes the snuff from one's horn, just here. It's the best place for letting blood. For only consider, the blood from the arm comes from the vein, but here it is of no consequence. The doctors don't know that and don't understand it, how should they, the idle drones, the wretched Germans? It's the blacksmiths who go in for it. And aren't they skilful! They get a chisel, give it a tap with a hammer and it's done! . . . Well, while I was thinking it over, it got quite dark, it was time for bed. I went to bed and Trésor, of course, was close by me. But whether it was from the fight,

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from the stuffiness, from the fleas or from my thoughts, I could not get to sleep, do what I would! I can't describe the depression that came over me; I sipped water, opened the window and played the 'Kamarinsky' with Italian variations on the guitar. . . . No good! I felt I must get out of the room—and that was all about it! I made up my mind at last: I took my pillow, my quilt and my sheet and made my way across the garden to the hayloft; and settled myself there. And how pleasant I felt in there, gentlemen: it was a still, still night, only from time to time a breath of air like a woman's hand caressed one's cheek; it was so fresh; the hay smelt as sweet as tea; among the apple trees the grasshoppers were chirping; then all at once came the cry of the quail—and one felt that he, too, the rogue, was happy, sitting in the dew with his little lady. . . . And the sky was magnificent. . . . The stars were glowing, or a cloud would float by, white as cotton wool, scarcely moving. . . ."

At this point in the story Skvorevitch sneezed; Kinarevitch sneezed, too—he never failed in anything to follow his colleague's ex-

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ample. Anton Stepanitch looked approvingly at both of them.

"Well," Porfiry Kapitonitch went on, "well, so I lay there and again could not go to sleep. I fell to musing, and what I thought of most was the strangeness of it all: how correctly Prohoritch had explained it as a warning and I wondered why it was to me such marvels had happened. . . . I marvelled—particularly because I could make nothing of it—and Trésor kept whining, as he twisted round in the hay; his wounds hurt him. And I will tell you what else prevented me from sleeping—you won't believe it—the moon. It was just facing me, so big and round and yellow and flat, and it seemed to me that it was staring at me, it really did. And so insolently, so persistently. . . . I put out my tongue at it at last, I really did. What are you so inquisitive about? I thought. I turned away from it and it seemed to be creeping into my ear and shining on the back of my head, so that I felt caught in it as in rain; I opened my eyes and every blade of grass, every paltry being in the hay, the most flimsy spider's web—all were standing out as

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though they were chiselled! As though asking to be looked at! There was no help for it: I leaned my head on my hand and began gazing. And I couldn't help it: would you believe it: my eyes bulged out like a hare's; they opened so wide—as though they did not know what sleep was! It seemed as though I would devour it all with my eyes. The doors of the barn were wide open; I could see for four miles into the open country, distinctly and yet not, as it always is on a moonlight night. I gazed and gazed without blinking. . . . And all at once it seemed as though something were moving, far, far away . . . like a faint glimmer in the distance. A little time passed: again the shadow stirred—now a little nearer; then again nearer still. 'What can it be?' I wondered, 'a hare, no,' I thought, 'it is bigger than a hare and its action is not the same.' I looked, and again the shadow came in sight, and was moving across the grazing meadow (the meadow looked whitish in the moonlight) like a big blur; it was clear that it was a wild animal, a fox or a wolf. My heart seemed to stand still . . . though one might wonder why I was

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frightened. All sorts of wild creatures run about the fields at night. But curiosity was even stronger than fear. I sat up, I opened my eyes wide and I turned cold all over. I felt frozen, as though I had been thrust into the ice, up to my ears, and why? The Lord only knows! And I saw the shadow growing and growing, so it was running straight towards the barn. And I began to realise that it certainly was a wild beast, big, with a huge head. . . . He flew like a whirlwind, like a bullet. . . . Holy saints! what was it? He stopped all at once, as though he scented something. . . . Why it was . . . the same mad dog! It was . . . it was! Heavens! And I could not stir, I could not cry out. . . . It darted to the doors, with glittering eyes, howled and dashed through the hay straight at me!

“Out of the hay like a lion leapt my Trésor, here he was. They hung on to each other’s jaws and rolled on the ground. What happened then I don’t remember; all I remember is that I flew headlong between them into the garden, and home and into my bedroom and almost crept under the bed—why not make a

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clean breast of it? And what leaps, what bounds I took in the garden! The *premiere danseuse* dancing before the Emperor Napoleon on his nameday couldn't have kept pace with me. However, when I had recovered myself a little, I roused the whole household; I ordered them all to arm themselves, I myself took a sword and a revolver (I bought that revolver, I must own, soon after the emancipation, you know, in case anything should happen, but it turned out the man who sold it was such a rogue—it would be sure to miss fire twice out of every three shots). Well, I took all this and so we went, a regular horde of us with stakes and lanterns, to the barn. We approached and called—there was not a sound; at last we went into the barn. . . . And what did we see? My poor Trésor lay dead with his throat torn open, and of the other, the damned brute, not a trace to be seen!

“And then, gentlemen, I howled like a calf and I am not ashamed to say so; I stooped down to the friend who had saved my life twice over and kissed his head, again and again. And I stayed in that position until my old

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housekeeper, Praskovya (she, too, had run in at the uproar), brought me to my senses. 'How can you, Porfiry Kapitonitch,' she said, 'distress yourself so about a dog? And you will catch cold, too, God forbid.' (I was very lightly clad.) 'And if this dog has lost his life in saving you, it may be taken as a great blessing vouchsafed him!'

"Though I did not agree with Praskovya, I went home. And next day a soldier of the garrison shot the mad dog. And it must have been its destined end: it was the first time in his life that the soldier had fired a gun, though he had a medal for service in 1812. So this was the supernatural incident that happened to me."

The speaker ceased and began filling his pipe. We all looked at each other in amazement.

"Well, perhaps, you have led a very virtuous life," Mr. Finoplentov began, "so in recompense . . ."

But he broke off at that word, for he saw Porfiry Kapitonitch's cheeks grow round and flushed while his eyes screwed up—he was on the point of breaking into a guffaw.

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"But if one admits the possibility of the supernatural, the possibility of its participation in everyday life, so to say," Anton Stepanitch began again, "then allow me to ask, what becomes of common sense?"

None of us found anything to say in reply and we remained in perplexity as before.

1866. .



# THE WATCH

## AN OLD MAN'S STORY

### I

I WILL tell you my adventures with a watch. It is a curious story.

It happened at the very beginning of this century, in 1801. I had just reached my sixteenth year. I was living at Ryazan in a little wooden house not far from the bank of the river Oka with my father, my aunt and my cousin; my mother I do not remember; she died three years after her marriage; my father had no other children. His name was Porfiry Petrovitch. He was a quiet man, sickly and unattractive in appearance; he was employed in some sort of legal and—other—business. In old days such were called attorneys, sharpers, nettle-seeds; he called himself a lawyer. Our domestic life was presided over by his sister, my aunt, an old maiden lady of fifty; my

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father, too, had passed his fourth decade. My aunt was very pious, or, to speak bluntly, she was a canting hypocrite and a chattering magpie, who poked her nose into everything; and, indeed, she had not a kind heart like my father. We were not badly off, but had nothing to spare. My father had a brother called Yëgor; but he had been sent to Siberia in the year 1797 for some "seditious acts and Jacobin tendencies" (those were the words of the accusation).

Yegor's son David, my cousin, was left on my father's hands and lived with us. He was only one year older than I; but I respected him and obeyed him as though he were quite grown up. He was a sensible fellow with character; in appearance, thick-set and broad-shouldered with a square face covered with freckles, with red hair, small grey eyes, thick lips, a short nose, and short fingers—a sturdy lad, in fact—and strong for his age! My aunt could not endure him; my father was positively afraid of him . . . or perhaps he felt himself to blame towards him. There was a rumour that, if my father had not given his brother away,

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David's father would not have been sent to Siberia. We were both at the high school and in the same class and both fairly high up in it; I was, indeed, a little better at my lessons than David. I had a good memory but boys—as we all know!—do not think much of such superiority, and David remained my leader.

### II

My name—you know—is Alexey. I was born on the seventh of March and my name-day is the seventeenth. In accordance with the old-fashioned custom, I was given the name of the saint whose festival fell on the tenth day after my birth. My godfather was a certain Anastasy Anastasyevitch Putchkov, or more exactly Nastasey Nastasyeitch, for that was what everyone called him. He was a terribly shifty, pettifogging knave and bribe-taker—a thoroughly bad man; he had been turned out of the provincial treasury and had had to stand his trial on more than one occasion; he was often of use to my father. . . . They used to “do business” together. In appearance he was a round, podgy figure; and his face was

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like a fox's with a nose like an owl's. His eyes were brown, bright, also like a fox's, and he was always moving them, those eyes, to right and to left, and he twitched his nose, too, as though he were sniffing the air. He wore shoes without heels, and wore powder every day, which was looked upon as very exceptional in the provinces. He used to declare that he could not go without powder as he had to associate with generals and their ladies. Well, my name-day had come. Nastasey Nastasyeitch came to the house and said:

"I have never made you a present up to now, godson, but to make up for that, look what a fine thing I have brought you to-day."

And he took out of his pocket a silver watch, a regular turnip, with a rose tree engraved on the face and a brass chain. I was overwhelmed with delight, while my aunt, Pelageya Petrovna, shouted at the top of her voice:

"Kiss his hand, kiss his hand, dirty brat!"

I proceeded to kiss my godfather's hand, while my aunt went piping on:

"Oh, Nastasey Nastasyeitch! Why do you spoil him like this? How can he take care of

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a watch? He will be sure to drop it, break it, or spoil it."

My father walked in, looked at the watch, thanked Nastasey Nastasyeitch — somewhat carelessly, and invited him to his study. And I heard my father say, as though to himself:

"If you think to get off *with that*, my man. . . ." But I could not stay still. I put on the watch and rushed headlong to show my present to David.

### III

David took the watch, opened it and examined it attentively. He had great mechanical ability; he liked having to do with iron, copper, and metals of all sorts; he had provided himself with various instruments, and it was nothing for him to mend or even to make a screw, a key or anything of that kind.

David turned the watch about in his hands and muttering through his teeth (he was not talkative as a rule):

"Oh . . . poor . . ." added, "where did you get it?"

I told him that my godfather had given it me.

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David turned his little grey eyes upon me:

"Nastasey?"

"Yes, Nastasey Nastasyeitch."

David laid the watch on the table and walked away without a word.

"Do you like it?" I asked.

"Well, it isn't that. . . . But if I were you, I would not take any sort of present from Nastasey."

"Why?"

"Because he is a contemptible person; and you ought not to be under an obligation to a contemptible person. And to say thank you to him, too. I suppose you kissed his hand?"

"Yes, Aunt made me."

David grinned—a peculiar grin—to himself. That was his way. He never laughed aloud; he considered laughter a sign of feebleness.

David's words, his silent grin, wounded me deeply. "So he inwardly despises me," I thought. "So I, too, am contemptible in his eyes. He would never have stooped to this himself! He would not have accepted presents from Nastasey. But what am I to do now?"

Give back the watch? Impossible!

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I did try to talk to David, to ask his advice. He told me that he never gave advice to anyone and that I had better do as I thought best. As I thought best!! I remember I did not sleep all night afterwards: I was in agonies of indecision. I was sorry to lose the watch—I had laid it on the little table beside my bed; its ticking was so pleasant and amusing . . . but to feel that David despised me (yes, it was useless to deceive myself, he did despise me) . . . that seemed to me unbearable. Towards morning a determination had taken shape in me . . . I wept, it is true—but I fell asleep upon it, and as soon as I woke up, I dressed in haste and ran out into the street. I had made up my mind to give my watch to the first poor person I met.

### IV

I had not run far from home when I hit upon what I was looking for. I came across a bare-legged boy of ten, a ragged urchin, who was often hanging about near our house. I dashed up to him at once and, without giving him

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or myself time to recover, offered him my watch.

The boy stared at me round-eyed, put one hand before his mouth, as though he were afraid of being scalded—and held out the other.

"Take it, take it," I muttered, "it's mine, I give it you, you can sell it, and buy yourself . . . something you want. . . . Good-bye."

I thrust the watch into his hand—and went home at a gallop. Stopping for a moment at the door of our common bedroom to recover my breath, I went up to David who had just finished dressing and was combing his hair.

"Do you know what, David?" I said in as unconcerned a tone as I could, "I have given away Nastasey's watch."

David looked at me and passed the brush over his temples.

"Yes," I added in the same businesslike voice, "I have given it away. There is a very poor boy, a beggar, you know, so I have given it to him."

David put down the brush on the washing-stand.

"He can buy something useful," I went on,



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"with the money he can get for it. Anyway, he will get something for it."

I paused.

"Well," David said at last, "that's a good thing," and he went off to the schoolroom. I followed him.

"And if they ask you what you have done with it?" he said, turning to me.

"I shall tell them I've lost it," I answered carelessly.

No more was said about the watch between us that day; but I had the feeling that David not only approved of what I had done but . . . was to some extent surprised by it. He really was!

## V

Two days more passed. It happened that no one in the house thought of the watch. My father was taken up with a very serious unpleasantness with one of his clients; he had no attention to spare for me or my watch. I, on the other hand, thought of it without ceasing! Even the approval . . . the presumed approval of David did not quite comfort me. He

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did not show it in any special way: the only thing he said, and that casually, was that he hadn't expected such recklessness of me. Certainly I was a loser by my sacrifice: it was not counter-balanced by the gratification afforded me by my vanity.

And what is more, as ill-luck would have it, another schoolfellow of ours, the son of the town doctor, must needs turn up and begin boasting of a new watch, a present from his grandmother, and not even a silver, but a pinch-back one. . . .

I could not bear it, at last, and, without a word to anyone, slipped out of the house and proceeded to hunt for the beggar boy to whom I had given my watch.

I soon found him; he was playing knuckle-bones in the churchyard with some other boys. I called him aside—and, breathless and stammering, told him that my family were angry with me for having given away the watch—and that if he would consent to give it back to me I would gladly pay him for it. . . . To be ready for any emergency, I had brought with me an old-fashioned rouble of the reign of

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Elizabeth, which represented the whole of my fortune.

"But I haven't got it, your watch," answered the boy in an angry and tearful voice; "my father saw it and took it away from me; and he was for thrashing me, too. 'You must have stolen it from somewhere,' he said. 'What fool is going to make you a present of a watch?'"

"And who is your father?"

"My father? Trofimitch."

"But what is he? What's his trade?"

"He is an old soldier, a sergeant. And he has no trade at all. He mends old shoes, he re-soles them. That's all his trade. That's what he lives by."

"Where do you live? Take me to him."

"To be sure I will. You tell my father that you gave me the watch. For he keeps pitching into me, and calling me a thief! And my mother, too. 'Who is it you are taking after,' she says, 'to be a thief?'"

I set off with the boy to his home. They lived in a smoky hut in the back-yard of a factory, which had long ago been burnt down and

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not rebuilt. We found both Trofimitch and his wife at home. The discharged sergeant was a tall old man, erect and sinewy, with yellowish grey whiskers, an unshaven chin and a perfect network of wrinkles on his cheeks and forehead. His wife looked older than he. Her red eyes, which looked buried in her unhealthily puffy face, kept blinking dejectedly. Some sort of dark rags hung about them by way of clothes.

I explained to Trofimitch what I wanted and why I had come. He listened to me in silence without once winking or moving from me his stupid and strained—typically soldierly—eyes.

“Whims and fancies!” he brought out at last in a husky, toothless bass. “Is that the way gentlemen behave? And if Petka really did not steal the watch—then I’ll give him one for that! To teach him not to play the fool with little gentlemen! And if he did steal it, then I would give it to him in a very different style, whack, whack, whack! With the flat of a sword; in horseguard’s fashion! No need

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to think twice about it! What's the meaning of it? Eh? Go for them with sabres! Here's a nice business! Tfoo!"

This last interjection Trofimitch pronounced in a falsetto. He was obviously perplexed.

"If you are willing to restore the watch to me," I explained to him—I did not dare to address him familiarly in spite of his being a soldier—"I will with pleasure pay you this rouble here. The watch is not worth more, I imagine."

"Well!" growled Trofimitch, still amazed and, from old habit, devouring me with his eyes as though I were his superior officer. "It's a queer business, eh? Well, there it is, no understanding it. Ulyana, hold your tongue!" he snapped out at his wife who was opening her mouth. "Here's the watch," he added, opening the table drawer; "if it really is yours, take it by all means; but what's the rouble for? Eh?"

"Take the rouble, Trofimitch, you senseless man," wailed his wife. "You have gone crazy in your old age! We have not a half-rouble between us, and then you stand on your dig-

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nity! It was no good their cutting off your pigtail, you are a regular old woman just the same! How can you go on like that—when you know nothing about it? . . . Take the money, if you have a fancy to give back the watch!”

“Ulyana, hold your tongue, you dirty slut!” Trofimitch repeated. “Whoever heard of such a thing, talking away? Eh? The husband is the head; and yet she talks! Petka, don’t budge, I’ll kill you. . . . Here’s the watch!”

Trofimitch held out the watch to me, but did not let go of it.

He pondered, looked down, then fixed the same intent, stupid stare upon me. Then all at once bawled at the top of his voice: “

“Where is it? Where’s your rouble?”

“Here it is, here it is,” I responded hurriedly and I snatched the coin out of my pocket.

But he did not take it, he still stared at me. I laid the rouble on the table. He suddenly brushed it into the drawer, thrust the watch into my hand and wheeling to the left with a loud stamp, he hissed at his wife and his son:

“Get along, you low wretches!”

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Ulyana muttered something, but I had already dashed out into the yard and into the street. Thrusting the watch to the very bottom of my pocket and clutching it tightly in my hand, I hurried home.

### VI

I had regained the possession of my watch but it afforded me no satisfaction whatever. I did not venture to wear it, it was above all necessary to conceal from David what I had done. What would he think of me, of my lack of will? I could not even lock up the luckless watch in a drawer: we had all our drawers in common. I had to hide it, sometimes on the top of the cupboard, sometimes under my mattress, sometimes behind the stove. . . . And yet I did not succeed in hoodwinking David.

One day I took the watch from under a plank in the floor of our room and proceeded to rub the silver case with an old chamois leather glove. David had gone off somewhere in the town; I did not at all expect him to be back quickly. . . . Suddenly he was in the doorway.

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I was so overcome that I almost dropped the watch, and, utterly disconcerted, my face painfully flushing crimson, I fell to fumbling about my waistcoat with it, unable to find my pocket.

David looked at me and, as usual, smiled without speaking.

"What's the matter?" he brought out at last. "You imagined I didn't know you had your watch again? I saw it the very day you brought it back."

"I assure you," I began, almost on the point of tears. . . .

David shrugged his shoulders.

"The watch is yours, you are free to do what you like with it."

Saying these cruel words, he went out.

I was overwhelmed with despair. This time there could be no doubt! David certainly despised me.

I could not leave it so.

"I will show him," I thought, clenching my teeth, and at once with a firm step I went into the passage, found our page-boy, Yushka, and presented him with the watch!

Yushka would have refused it, but I declared that if he did not take the watch from



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me I would smash it that very minute, trample it under foot, break it to bits and throw it in the cesspool! He thought a moment, giggled, and took the watch. I went back to our room and seeing David reading there, I told him what I had done.

David did not take his eyes off the page and, again shrugging his shoulder and smiling to himself, repeated that the watch was mine and that I was free to do what I liked with it.

But it seemed to me that he already despised me a little less.

I was fully persuaded that I should never again expose myself to the reproach of weakness of character, for the watch, the disgusting present from my disgusting godfather, had suddenly grown so distasteful to me that I was quite incapable of understanding how I could have regretted it, how I could have begged for it back from the wretched Trofimitch, who had, moreover, the right to think that he had treated me with generosity.

Several days passed. . . . I remember that on one of them the great news reached our town that the Emperor Paul was dead and his

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son Alexandr, of whose graciousness and humanity there were such favourable rumours, had ascended the throne. This news excited David intensely: the possibility of seeing—of shortly seeing—his father occurred to him at once. My father was delighted, too.

"They will bring back all the exiles from Siberia now and I expect brother Yegor will not be forgotten," he kept repeating, rubbing his hands, coughing and, at the same time, seeming rather nervous.

David and I at once gave up working and going to the high school; we did not even go for walks but sat in a corner counting and reckoning in how many months, in how many weeks, in how many days "brother Yegor" ought to come back and where to write to him and how to go to meet him and in what way we should begin to live afterwards. "Brother Yegor" was an architect: David and I decided that he ought to settle in Moscow and there build big schools for poor people and we would go to be his assistants. The watch, of course, we had completely forgotten; besides, David had new cares. . . . Of them I will speak later,

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but the watch was destined to remind us of its existence again.

### VII

One morning we had only just finished lunch—I was sitting alone by the window thinking of my uncle's release—outside there was the steam and glitter of an April thaw—when all at once my aunt, Pelageya Petrovna, walked into the room. She was at all times restless and fidgetty, she spoke in a shrill voice and was always waving her arms about; on this occasion she simply pounced on me.

"Go along, go to your father at once, sir!" she snapped out. "What pranks have you been up to, you shameless boy! You will catch it, both of you. Nastasey Nastasyeitch has shown up all your tricks! Go along, your father wants you. . . . Go along this very minute."

Understanding nothing, I followed my aunt, and, as I crossed the threshold of the drawing-room, I saw my father, striding up and down and ruffling up his hair, Yushka in tears by the door and, sitting on a chair in the corner, my godfather, Nastasey Nastasyeitch, with an

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expression of peculiar malignancy in his distended nostrils and in his fiery, slanting eyes.

My father swooped down upon me as soon as I walked in.

"Did you give your watch to Yushka? Tell me!"

I glanced at Yushka.

"Tell me," repeated my father, stamping.

"Yes," I answered, and immediately received a stinging slap in the face, which afforded my aunt great satisfaction. I heard her gulp, as though she had swallowed some hot tea. From me my father ran to Yushka.

"And you, you rascal, ought not to have dared to accept such a present," he said, pulling him by the hair: "and you sold it, too, you good-for-nothing boy!"

Yushka, as I learned later had, in the simplicity of his heart, taken my watch to a neighbouring watchmaker's. The watchmaker had displayed it in his shop-window; Nastasey Nastasyeitch had seen it, as he passed by, bought it and brought it along with him.

However, my ordeal and Yushka's did not last long: my father gasped for breath, and

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coughed till he choked; indeed, it was not in his character to be angry long.

"Brother, Porfiry Petrovitch," observed my aunt, as soon as she noticed not without regret that my father's anger had, so to speak, flickered out, "don't you worry yourself further: it's not worth dirtying your hands over. I tell you what I suggest: with the consent of our honoured friend, Nastasey Nastasyeitch, in consideration of the base ingratitude of your son—I will take charge of the watch; and since he has shown by his conduct that he is not worthy to wear it and does not even understand its value, I will present it in your name to a person who will be very sensible of your kindness."

"Whom do you mean?" asked my father.

"To Hrisanf Lukitch," my aunt articulated, with slight hesitation.

"To Hrisashka?" asked my father, and with a wave of his hand, he added: "It's all one to me. You can throw it in the stove, if you like."

He buttoned up his open vest and went out, writhing from his coughing.

"And you, my good friend, do you agree?"

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said my aunt, addressing Nastasey Nastasyevitch.

"I am quite agreeable," responded the latter. During the whole proceedings he had not stirred and only snorting stealthily and stealthily rubbing the ends of his fingers, had fixed his foxy eyes by turns on me, on my father, and on Yushka. We afforded him real gratification!

My aunt's suggestion revolted me to the depths of my soul. It was not that I regretted the watch; but the person to whom she proposed to present it was absolutely hateful to me. This Hrisanf Lukitch (his surname was Trankvillitatin), a stalwart, robust, lanky divinity student, was in the habit of coming to our house—goodness knows what for!—to help the *children* with their lessons, my aunt asserted; but he could not help us with our lessons because he had never learnt anything himself and was as stupid as a horse. He was rather like a horse altogether: he thudded with his feet as though they had been hoofs, did not laugh but neighed, opening his jaws till you could see right down his throat—and he

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had a long face, a hooked nose and big, flat jaw-bones; he wore a shaggy frieze, full-skirted coat, and smelt of raw meat. My aunt idolised him and called him a good-looking man, a cavalier and even a grenadier. He had a habit of tapping children on the forehead with the nails of his long fingers, hard as stones (he used to do it to me when I was younger), and as he tapped he would chuckle and say with surprise: "How your head resounds, it must be empty." And this lout was to possess my watch!—No, indeed, I determined in my own mind as I ran out of the drawing-room and flung myself on my bed, while my cheek glowed crimson from the slap I had received and my heart, too, was aglow with the bitterness of the insult and the thirst for revenge—no, indeed! I would not allow that cursed Hrisashka to jeer at me. . . . He would put on the watch, let the chain hang over his stomach, would neigh with delight; no, indeed!

"Quite so, but how was it to be done, how to prevent it?"

I determined to steal the watch from my aunt.

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### VIII

Luckily Trankvillitatin was away from the town at the time: he could not come to us before the next day; I must take advantage of the night! My aunt did not lock her bedroom door and, indeed, none of the keys in the house would turn in the locks; but where would she put the watch, where would she hide it? She kept it in her pocket till the evening and even took it out and looked at it more than once; but at night—where would it be at night?—Well, that was just my work to find out, I thought, shaking my fists.

I was burning with boldness and terror and joy at the thought of the approaching crime. I was continually nodding to myself; I knitted my brows. I whispered: "Wait a bit!" I threatened someone, I was wicked, I was dangerous . . . and I avoided David!—no one, not even he, must have the slightest suspicion of what I meant to do. . . .

I would act alone and alone I would answer for it!

Slowly the day lagged by, then the evening,



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at last the night came. I did nothing; I even tried not to move: one thought was stuck in my head like a nail. At dinner my father, who was, as I have said, naturally gentle, and who was a little ashamed of his harshness—boys of sixteen are not slapped in the face—tried to be affectionate to me; but I rejected his overtures, not from slowness to forgive, as he imagined at the time, but simply that I was afraid of my feelings getting the better of me; I wanted to preserve untouched all the heat of my vengeance, all the hardness of unalterable determination. I went to bed very early; but of course I did not sleep and did not even shut my eyes, but on the contrary opened them wide, though I did pull the quilt over my head. I did not consider beforehand how to act. I had no plan of any kind; I only waited till everything should be quiet in the house. I only took one step: I did not remove my stockings. My aunt's room was on the second floor. One had to pass through the dining-room and the hall, go up the stairs, pass along a little passage and there . . . on the right was the door! I must not on any account take with me a can-

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dle or a lantern; in the corner of my aunt's room a little lamp was always burning before the ikon shrine; I knew that. So I should be able to see. I still lay with staring eyes and my mouth open and parched; the blood was throbbing in my temples, in my ears, in my throat, in my back, all over me! I waited . . . but it seemed as though some demon were mocking me; time passed and passed but still silence did not reign.

### IX

Never, I thought, had David been so late getting to sleep. . . . David, the silent David, even began talking to me! Never had they gone on so long banging, talking, walking about the house! And what could they be talking about? I wondered; as though they had not had the whole day to talk in! Sounds outside persisted, too; first a dog barked on a shrill, obstinate note; then a drunken peasant was making an uproar somewhere and would not be pacified; then gates kept creaking; then a wretched cart on racketty wheels kept passing and passing and seeming as though it would

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never pass! However, these sounds did not worry me: on the contrary, I was glad of them; they seemed to distract my attention. But now at last it seemed as though all were tranquil. Only the pendulum of our old clock ticked gravely and drowsily in the dining-room and there was an even drawn-out sound like the hard breathing of people asleep. I was on the point of getting up, then again something rustled . . . then suddenly sighed, something soft fell down . . . and a whisper glided along the walls.

Or was there nothing of the sort—and was it only imagination mocking me?

At last all was still. It was the very heart, the very dead of night. The time had come! Chill with anticipation, I threw off the bed-clothes, let my feet down to the floor, stood up . . . one step; a second. . . . I stole along, my feet, heavy as though they did not belong to me, trod feebly and uncertainly. Stay! what was that sound? Someone sawing, somewhere, or scraping . . . or sighing? I listened . . . I felt my cheeks twitching and cold watery tears came into my eyes. Nothing! . . . I stole on

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again. It was dark but I knew the way. All at once I stumbled against a chair. . . . What a bang and how it hurt! It hit me just on my leg. . . . I stood stock still. Well, did that wake them? Ah! here goes! Suddenly I felt bold and even spiteful. On! On! Now the dining-room was crossed, then the door was groped for and opened at one swing. The cursed hinge squeaked, bother it! Then I went up the stairs, one! two! one! two! A step creaked under my foot; I looked at it spitefully, just as though I could see it. Then I stretched for the handle of another door. This one made not the slightest sound! It flew open so easily, as though to say, "Pray walk in." . . . And now I was in the corridor! ~

In the corridor there was a little window high up under the ceiling, a faint light filtered in through the dark panes. And in that glimmer of light I could see our little errand girl lying on the floor on a mat, both arms behind her tousled head; she was sound asleep, breathing rapidly and the fatal door was just behind her head. I stepped across the mat, across the girl . . . who opened that door? . . . I don't

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know, but there I was in my aunt's room. There was the little lamp in one corner and the bed in the other and my aunt in her cap and night jacket on the bed with her face towards me. She was asleep, she did not stir, I could not even hear her breathing. The flame of the little lamp softly flickered, stirred by the draught of fresh air, and shadows stirred all over the room, even over the motionless wax-like yellow face of my aunt. . . .

And there was the watch! It was hanging on a little embroidered cushion on the wall behind the bed. What luck, only think of it! Nothing to delay me! But whose steps were those, soft and rapid behind my back? Oh! no! it was my heart beating! . . . I moved my legs forward. . . . Good God! something round and rather large pushed against me below my knee, once and again! I was ready to scream, I was ready to drop with horror. . . . A striped cat, our own cat, was standing before me arching his back and wagging his tail. Then he leapt on the bed—softly and heavily—turned round and sat without purring, exactly like a judge; he sat and looked at me with his golden

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pupils. "Puss, puss," I whispered, hardly audibly. I bent across my aunt, I had already snatched the watch. She suddenly sat up and opened her eyelids wide. . . . Heavenly Father, what next? . . . but her eyelids quivered and closed and with a faint murmur her head sank on the pillow.

A minute later I was back again in my own room, in my own bed and the watch was in my hands. . . .

More lightly than a feather I flew back! I was a fine fellow, I was a thief, I was a hero I was gasping with delight, I was hot, I was gleeful—I wanted to wake David at once to tell him all about it—and, incredible as it sounds, I fell asleep and slept like the dead! At last I opened my eyes. . . . It was light in the room, the sun had risen. Luckily no one was awake yet. I jumped up as though I had been scalded, woke David and told him all about it. He listened, smiled. "Do you know what?" he said to me at last, "let's bury the silly watch in the earth, so that it may never be seen again." I thought his idea best of all. In a few minutes we were both dressed; we ran out into the

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orchard behind our house and under an old apple tree in a deep hole, hurriedly scooped out in the soft, springy earth with David's big knife, my godfather's hated present was hidden forever, so that it never got into the hands of the disgusting Trankvillitatin after all! We stamped down the hole, strewed rubbish over it and, proud and happy, unnoticed by anyone, went home again, got into our beds and slept another hour or two—and such a light and blissful sleep!

### X

You can imagine the uproar there was that morning, as soon as my aunt woke up and missed the watch! Her piercing shriek is ringing in my ears to this day. "Help! Robbed! Robbed!" she squealed, and alarmed the whole household. She was furious, while David and I only smiled to ourselves and sweet was our smile to us. "Everyone, everyone must be well thrashed!" bawled my aunt. "The watch has been stolen from under my head, from under my pillow!" We were prepared for anything,

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we expected trouble. . . . But contrary to our expectations we did not get into trouble at all. My father certainly did fume dreadfully at first, he even talked of the police; but I suppose he was bored with the enquiry of the day before and suddenly, to my aunt's indescribable amazement, he flew out not against us but against her.

"You sicken me worse than a bitter radish, Pelageya Petrovna," he shouted, "with your watch. I don't want to hear any more about it! It can't be lost by magic, you say, but what's it to do with me? It may be magic for all I care! Stolen from you? Well, good luck to it then! What will Nastasey Nastasyeitch say? Damnation take him, your Nastasyeitch! I get nothing but annoyances and unpleasantness from him! Don't dare to worry me again! Do you hear?"

My father slammed the door and went off to his own room. David and I did not at first understand the allusion in his last words; but afterwards we found out that my father was just then violently indignant with my god-



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father, who had done him out of a profitable job. So my aunt was left looking a fool. She almost burst with vexation, but there was no help for it. She had to confine herself to repeating in a sharp whisper, twisting her mouth in my direction whenever she passed me, "Thief, thief, robber, scoundrel." My aunt's reproaches were a source of real enjoyment to me. It was very agreeable, too, as I crossed the flower-garden, to let my eye with assumed indifference glide over the very spot where the watch lay at rest under the apple-tree; and if David were close at hand to exchange a meaning grimace with him. . . .

My aunt tried setting Trankvillitatin upon me; but I appealed to David. He told the stalwart divinity student bluntly that he would rip up his belly with a knife if he did not leave me alone. . . . Trankvillitatin was frightened; though, according to my aunt, he was a grenadier and a cavalier he was not remarkable for valour. So passed five weeks. . . . But do you imagine that the story of the watch ended there? No, it did not; only to continue my story I

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must introduce a new character; and to introduce that new character I must go back a little.

### XI

My father had for many years been on very friendly, even intimate terms with a retired government clerk called Latkin, a lame little man in poor circumstances with queer, timid manners, one of those creatures of whom it is commonly said that they are crushed by God Himself. Like my father and Nastasey, he was engaged in the humbler class of legal work and acted as legal adviser and agent. But possessing neither a presentable appearance nor the gift of words and having little confidence in himself, he did not venture to act independently but attached himself to my father. His handwriting was "regular beadwork," he knew the law thoroughly and had mastered all the intricacies of the jargon of petitions and legal documents. He had managed various cases with my father and had shared with him gains and losses and it seemed as though nothing could shake their friendship, and yet it broke

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down in one day and forever. My father quarrelled with his colleague for good. If Latkin had snatched a profitable job from my father, after the fashion of Nastasey, who replaced him later on, my father would have been no more indignant with him than with Nastasey, probably less. But Latkin, under the influence of an unexplained, incomprehensible feeling, envy, greed—or perhaps even a momentary fit of honesty—"gave away" my father, betrayed him to their common client, a wealthy young merchant, opening this careless young man's eyes to a certain—well, piece of sharp practice, destined to bring my father considerable profit. It was not the money loss, however great—no—but the betrayal that wounded and infuriated my father; he could not forgive treachery.

"So he sets himself up for a saint!" he repeated, trembling all over with anger, his teeth chattering as though he were in a fever. I happened to be in the room and was a witness of this ugly scene. "Good. Amen, from to-day. It's all over between us. There's the ikon and there's the door! Neither you in my

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house nor I in yours. You are too honest for us. How can we keep company with you? But may you have no house nor home!"

It was in vain that Latkin entreated my father and bowed down before him; it was in vain that he tried to explain to him what filled his own soul with painful perplexity. "You know it was with no sort of profit to myself, Porfiry Petrovitch," he faltered: "why, I cut my own throat!" My father remained implacable. Latkin never set foot in our house again. Fate itself seemed determined to carry out my father's last cruel words. Soon after the rupture (which took place two years before the beginning of my story), Latkin's wife, who had, it is true, been ill for a long time, died; his second daughter, a child three years old, became deaf and dumb in one day from terror; a swarm of bees had settled on her head; Latkin himself had an apoplectic stroke and sank into extreme and hopeless poverty. How he struggled on, what he lived upon—it is hard to imagine. He lived in a dilapidated hovel at no great distance from our house. His elder daughter Raissa lived with him and kept house,

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so far as that was possible. This Raissa is the character whom I must now introduce into our story.

### XII

When her father was on friendly terms with mine, we used to see her continually. She would sit with us for hours at a time, either sewing, or spinning with her delicate, rapid, clever fingers. She was a well-made, rather thin girl, with intelligent brown eyes and a long, white, oval face. She talked little but sensibly in a soft, musical voice, barely opening her mouth and not showing her teeth. When she laughed—which happened rarely and never lasted long—they were all suddenly displayed, big and white as almonds. I remember her gait, too, light, elastic, with a little skip at each step. It always seemed to me that she was going down a flight of steps, even when she was walking on level ground. She held herself erect with her arms folded tightly over her bosom. And whatever she was doing, whatever she undertook, if she were only threading a needle or ironing a petticoat—the effect was

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always beautiful and somehow—you may not believe it—touching. Her Christian name was Raissa, but we used to call her Blacklip: she had on her upper lip a birthmark; a little dark-bluish spot, as though she had been eating blackberries; but that did not spoil her: on the contrary. She was just a year older than David. I cherished for her a feeling akin to respect, but we were not great friends. But between her and David a friendship had sprung up, a strange, unchildlike but good friendship. They somehow suited each other.

Sometimes they did not exchange a word for hours together, but both felt that they were happy and happy because they were together. I had never met a girl like her, really. There was something attentive and resolute about her, something honest and mournful and charming. I never heard her say anything very intelligent, but I never heard her say anything commonplace, and I have never seen more intelligent eyes. After the rupture between her family and mine I saw her less frequently: my father sternly forbade my visiting the Latkins, and she did not appear in our house again.

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But I met her in the street, in church and Black-lip always aroused in me the same feeling—respect and even some wonder, rather than pity. She bore her misfortunes very well indeed. “The girl is flint,” even coarse-witted, Trankvillitatin said about her once, but really she ought to have been pitied: her face acquired a careworn, exhausted expression, her eyes were hollow and sunken, a burden beyond her strength lay on her young shoulders. David saw her much oftener than I did; he used to go to their house. My father gave him up in despair: he knew that David would not obey him, anyway. And from time to time Raissa would appear at the hurdle fence of our garden which looked into a lane and there have an interview with David; she did not come for the sake of conversation, but told him of some new difficulty or trouble and asked his advice. The paralysis that had attacked Latkin was of a rather peculiar kind, His arms and legs had grown feeble, but he had not lost the use of them, and his brain indeed worked perfectly; but his speech was muddled and instead of one word he would pronounce

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another: one had to guess what it was he wanted to say. . . . "Tchoo—tchoo—tchoo," he would stammer with an effort—he began every sentence with "Tchoo—tchoo—tchoo, some scissors, some scissors," . . . and the word scissors meant bread. . . . My father, he hated with all the strength left him—he attributed all his misfortunes to my father's curse and called him alternately the butcher and the diamond-merchant. "Tchoo, tchoo, don't you dare to go to the butcher's, Vassilyevna." This was what he called his daughter though his own name was Martinyan. Every day he became more exacting; his needs increased. . . . And how were those needs to be satisfied? Where could the money be found? Sorrow soon makes one old: but it was horrible to hear some words on the lips of a girl of seventeen.

### XIII

I remember I happened to be present at a conversation with David over the fence, on the very day of her mother's death.

"Mother died this morning at daybreak," she



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said, first looking round with her dark expressive eyes and then fixing them on the ground.

"Cook undertook to get a coffin cheap but she's not to be trusted; she may spend the money on drink, even. You might come and look after her, Davidushka, she's afraid of you."

"I will come," answered David. "I will see to it. And how's your father?"

"He cries; he says: 'you must spoil me, too.' Spoil must mean bury. Now he has gone to sleep." Raissa suddenly gave a deep sigh. "Oh, Davidushka, Davidushka!" She passed her half-clenched fist over her forehead and her eyebrows, and the action was so bitter . . . and as sincere and beautiful as all her actions.

"You must take care of yourself, though," David observed; "you haven't slept at all, I expect. . . . And what's the use of crying? It doesn't help trouble."

"I have no time for crying," answered Raissa.

"That's a luxury for the rich, crying," observed David.

Raissa was going, but she turned back.

"The yellow shawl's being sold, you know;

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part of mother's dowry. They are giving us twelve roubles; I think that is not much."

"It certainly is not much."

"We shouldn't sell it," Raissa said after a brief pause, "but you see we must have money for the funeral."

"Of course you must. Only you mustn't spend money at random. Those priests are awful! But I say, wait a minute. I'll come. Are you going? I'll be with you soon. Good-bye, darling."

"Good-bye, Davidushka, darling."

"Mind now, don't cry!"

"As though I should cry! It's either cooking the dinner or crying. One or the other."

"What! does she cook the dinner?" I said to David, as soon as Raissa was out of hearing, "does she do the cooking herself?"

"Why, you heard that the cook has gone to buy a coffin."

"She cooks the dinner," I thought, "and her hands are always so clean and her clothes so neat. . . . I should like to see her there at work in the kitchen. . . . She is an extraordinary girl!"

I remember another conversation at the

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

fence. That time Raissa brought with her her little deaf and dumb sister. She was a pretty child with immense, astonished-looking eyes and a perfect mass of ~~dull~~, black hair on her little head (Raissa's hair, too, was black and hers, too, was without lustre). Latkin had by then been struck down by paralysis.

"I really don't know what to do," Raissa began. "The doctor has written a prescription. We must go to the chemist's; and our peasant (Latkin had still one serf) has brought us wood from the village and a goose. And the porter has taken it away, 'you are in debt to me,' he said."

"Taken the goose?" asked David.

"No, not the goose. He says it is an old one; it is no good for anything; he says that is why our peasant brought it us, but he is taking the wood."

"But he has no right to," exclaimed David.

"He has no right to, but he has taken it. I went up to the garret, there we have got a very, very old ~~trunk~~. I began rummaging in it and what do you think I found? Look!"

## THE WATCH

She took from under her kerchief a rather large field glass in a copper setting, covered with morocco, yellow with age. David, as a connoisseur of all sorts of instruments, seized upon it at once.

"It's English," he pronounced, putting it first to one eye and then to the other. "A marine glass."

"And the glasses are perfect," Raissa went on. "I showed it to father; he said, 'Take it and pawn it to the diamond-merchant'! What do you think, would they give us anything for it? What do we want a telescope for? To look at ourselves in the looking-glass and see what beauties we are? But we haven't a looking-glass, unluckily."

And Raissa suddenly laughed aloud. Her sister, of course, could not hear her. But most likely she felt the shaking of her body: she clung to Raissa's hand and her little face worked with a look of terror as she raised her big eyes to her sister and burst into tears.

"That's how she always is," said Raissa, "she doesn't like one to laugh."

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

"Come, I won't, Lyubotchka, I won't," she added, nimbly squatting on her heels beside the child and passing her fingers through her hair. The laughter vanished from Raissa's face and her lips, the corners of which twisted upwards in a particularly charming way, became motionless again. The child was pacified. Raissa got up.

"So you will do what you can, about the glass I mean, Davidushka. But I do regret the wood, and the goose, too, however old it may be."

"They would certainly give you ten roubles," said David, turning the telescope in all directions. "I will buy it of you, what could be better? And here, meanwhile, are fifteen kopecks for the chemist's. . . . Is that enough?"

"I'll borrow that from you," whispered Raissa, taking the fifteen kopecks from him.

"What next? Perhaps you would like to pay interest? But you see I have a pledge here, a very fine thing. . . . First-rate people, the English."

"They say we are going to war with them."

"No," answered David, "we are fighting the French now."

## THE WATCH

"Well, you know best. Take care of it, then. Good-bye, friends."

### XIV

Here is another conversation that took place beside the same fence. Raissa seemed more worried than usual.

"Five kopecks for a cabbage, and a tiny little one, too," she said, propping her chin on her hand. "Isn't it dear? And I haven't had the money for my sewing yet."

"Who owes it you?" asked David.

"Why, the merchant's wife who lives beyond the rampart."

"The fat woman who goes about in a green blouse?"

"Yes, yes."

"I say, she is fat! She can hardly breathe for fat. She positively steams in church, and doesn't pay her debts!"

"She will pay, only when? And do you know, Davidushka, I have fresh troubles. Father has taken it into his head to tell me his dreams—you know he cannot say what he means: if he wants to say one word, it comes

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

out another. About food or any everyday thing we have got used to it and understand; but it is not easy to understand the dreams even of healthy people, and with him, it's awful! 'I am very happy,' he says; 'I was walking about all among white birds to-day; and the Lord God gave me a nosegay and in the nosegay was Andryusha with a little knife,' he calls our Lyubotchka, Andryusha; 'now we shall both be quite well,' he says. 'We need only one stroke with the little knife, like this!' and he points to his throat. I don't understand him, but I say, 'All right, dear, all right,' but he gets angry and tries to explain what he means. He even bursts into tears."

"But you should have said something to him," I put in; "you should have made up some lie."

"I can't tell lies," answered Raissa, and even flung up her hands.

And indeed she could not tell lies.

"There is no need to tell lies," observed David, "but there is no need to kill yourself, either. No one will say thank you for it, you know."

## THE WATCH

Raissa looked at him intently.

"I wanted to ask you something, Davidushka; how ought I to spell 'while'?"

"What sort of 'while'?"

"Why, for instance: I hope you will live a long *while*."

"Spell: w-i-l-e."

"No," I put in, "w-h-i-l-e."

"Well, it does not matter. Spell it with an h, then! What does matter is, that you should live a long while."

"I should like to write correctly," observed Raissa, and she flushed a little.

When she flushed she was amazingly pretty at once.

"It may be of use. . . . How father wrote in his day . . . wonderfully! He taught me. Well, now he can hardly make out the letters."

"You only live, that's all I want," David repeated, dropping his voice and not taking his eyes off her. Raissa glanced quickly at him and flushed still more.

"You live and as for spelling, spell as you like. . . . Oh, the devil, the witch is coming!"



## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

(David called my aunt the witch.) "What ill-luck has brought her this way? You must go, darling."

Raissa glanced at David once more and ran away.

David talked to me of Raissa and her family very rarely and unwillingly, especially from the time when he began to expect his father's return. He thought of nothing but him and how we should live together afterwards. He had a vivid memory of him and used to describe him to me with particular pleasure.

"He is big and strong; he can lift three hundred-weight with one hand. . . . When he shouted: 'Where's the lad?' he could be heard all over the house. He's so jolly and kind . . . and a brave man! Nobody can intimidate him. We lived so happily together before we were ruined. They say he has gone quite grey, and in old days his hair was as red as mine. He was a strong man."

David would never admit that we might remain in Ryazan.

"You will go away," I observed, "but I shall stay."

## THE WATCH

"Nonsense, we shall take you with us."

"And how about my father?"

"You will cast off your father. You will be ruined if you don't."

"How so?"

David made me no answer but merely knitted his white brows.

"So when we go away with father," he began again, "he will get a good situation and I shall marry."

"Well, that won't be just directly," I said.

"No, why not? I shall marry soon."

"You?"

"Yes, I; why not?"

"You haven't fixed on your wife, I suppose."

"Of course, I have."

"Who is she?"

David laughed.

"What a senseless fellow you are, really? Raissa, of course."

"Raissa!" I repeated in amazement; "you are joking!"

"I am not given to joking, and don't like it."

"Why, she is a year older than you are."

"What of it? but let's drop the subject."

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

"Let me ask one question," I said. "Does she know that you mean to marry her?"

"Most likely."

"But haven't you declared your feelings?"

"What is there to declare? When the time comes I shall tell her. Come, that's enough."

David got up and went out of the room. When I was alone, I pondered . . . and pondered . . . and came to the conclusion that David would act like a sensible and practical man; and indeed I felt flattered at the thought of being the friend of such a practical man!

And Raissa in her everlasting black woollen dress suddenly seemed to me charming and worthy of the most devoted love.

## xv

David's father still did not come and did not even send a letter. It had long been summer and June was drawing to its end. We were wearing ourselves out in suspense.

Meanwhile there began to be rumours that Latkin had suddenly become much worse, and that his family were likely to die of hunger or else the house would fall in and crush them all under the roof.

## THE WATCH

David's face even looked changed and he became so ill-tempered and surly that there was no going near him. He began to be more often absent from home, too. I did not meet Raissa at all. From time to time, I caught a glimpse of her in the distance, rapidly crossing the street with her beautiful, light step, straight as an arrow, with her arms crossed, with her dark, clever eyes under her long brows, with an anxious expression on her pale, sweet face—that was all. My aunt with the help of her Trankvillitatin pitched into me as before, and as before reproachfully whispered in my ear: "You are a thief, sir, a thief!" But I took no notice of her; and my father was very busy, and occupied with his writing and driving all over the place and did not want to hear anything.

One day, passing by the familiar apple-tree, more from habit than anything I cast a furtive glance in the direction of the little spot I knew so well, and it suddenly struck me that there was a change in the surface of the soil that concealed our treasure . . . as though there were a little protuberance where there had been a hollow, and the bits of rubbish were disar-

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

ranged. "What does that mean?" I wondered. "Can someone have guessed our secret and dug up the watch?"

I had to make certain with my own eyes. I felt, of course, the most complete indifference in regard to the watch that lay rusting in the bosom of the earth; but was not prepared to let anyone else make use of it! And so next day I got up before dawn again and arming myself with a knife went into the orchard, sought out the marked spot under the apple-tree, began digging—and after digging a hole a yard deep was forced to the conviction that the watch was gone, that someone had got hold of it, taken it away, stolen it!

But who could have dug it up except David?

Who else knew where it was?

I filled in the hole and went back to the house. I felt deeply injured.

"Supposing," I thought, "that David needs the watch to save his future wife or her father from dying of starvation. . . . Say what you like, the watch was worth something. . . . Why did he not come to me and say: 'Brother' (in David's place I should have certainly begun by

## THE WATCH

saying brother), 'brother, I need money; you have none, I know, but let me make use of that watch which we buried together under the old apple-tree? It is of no use to anyone and I shall be so grateful to you, brother!' With what joy I should have consented. But to act secretly, treacherously, not to trust his friend. . . . No! No passion, no necessity would justify that!"

I repeat, I felt horribly injured. I began by a display of coldness and sulking. . . .

But David was not one of the sort to notice this and be upset by it.

I began dropping hints.

But David appeared not to understand my hints in the least!

I said before him how base in my eyes was the man who having a friend and understanding all that was meant by that sacred sentiment "friendship," was yet so devoid of generosity as to have recourse to deception; as though it were possible to conceal anything.

As I uttered these last words I laughed scornfully.

But David did not turn a hair. At last I

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

asked him straight out: "What did he think, had our watch gone for some time after being buried in the earth or had it stopped at once?"

He answered me: "The devil only knows! What a thing to wonder about!"

I did not know what to think! David evidently had something on his mind . . . but not the abduction of the watch. An unexpected incident showed me his innocence.

## XVI

One day I came home by a side lane which I usually avoided as the house in which my enemy Trankvillitin lodged was in it; but on this occasion Fate itself led me that way. Passing the open window of an eating-house, I suddenly heard the voice of our servant, Vassily, a young man of free and easy manners, "a lazy fellow and a scamp," as my father called him, but also a great conqueror of female hearts which he charmed by his wit, his dancing and his playing on the tambourine.

"And what do you suppose they've been up to?" said Vassily, whom I could not see but heard distinctly; he was, most likely, sitting

## THE WATCH

close by, near the window with a companion over the steaming tea—and as often happens with people in a closed room, spoke in a loud voice without suspecting that anyone passing in the street could hear every word: “They buried it in the ground!”

“Nonsense!” muttered another voice.

“I tell you they did, our young gentlemen are extraordinary! Especially that Davidka, he’s a regular Æsop! I got up at daybreak and went to the window. . . . I looked out and, what do you think! Our two little dears were coming along the orchard bringing that same watch and they dug a hole under the apple-tree and there they buried it, as though it had been a baby! And they smoothed the earth over afterwards, upon my soul they did, the young rakes!”

“Ah! plague take them,” Vassily’s companion commented. “Too well off, I suppose. Well, did you dig up the watch?”

“To be sure I did. I have got it now. Only it won’t do to show it for a time. There’s been no end of a fuss over it. Davidka stole it that very night from under our old lady’s back.”



## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

"Oh—oh!"

"I tell you, he did. He's a desperate fellow. So it won't do to show it. But when the officers come down I shall sell it or stake it at cards."

I didn't stay to hear more: I rushed headlong home and straight to David.

"Brother!" I began, "brother, forgive me! I have wronged you! I suspected you! I blamed you! You see how agitated I am! Forgive me!"

"What's the matter with you?" asked David. "Explain!"

"I suspected that you had dug up our watch under the apple-tree."

"The watch again! Why, isn't it there?"

"It's not there; I thought you had taken it, to help your friends. And it was all Vassily."

I repeated to David all that I had overheard under the window of the eating-house.

But how to describe my amazement! I had, of course, expected David to be indignant, but I had not for a moment anticipated the effect it produced on him! I had hardly finished my story when he flew into an indescribable fury! David, who had always taken up a scorn-

## THE WATCH

ful attitude to the whole "vulgar," as he called it, business of the watch; David, who had more than once declared that it wasn't worth a rotten egg, jumped up from his seat, got hot all over, ground his teeth and clenched his fists. "We can't let this pass!" he said at last; "how dare he take someone else's property? Wait a bit, I'll show him. I won't let thieves off so easily!"

I confess I don't understand to this day what can have so infuriated David. Whether he had been irritated before and Vassily's action had simply poured oil on the flames, or whether my suspicions had wounded him, I cannot say, but I had never seen him in such excitement. I stood before him with my mouth open merely wondering how it was that his breathing was so hard and laboured.

"What do you intend to do?" I asked at last.

"You shall see after dinner, when your father lies down. I'll find this scoffer, I'll talk to him."

"Well," thought I, "I should not care to be in that scoffer's shoes! What will happen? Merciful heavens?"

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

### XVII

This is what did happen:

As soon as that drowsy, stifling stillness prevailed, which to this day lies like a feather bed on the Russian household and the Russian people in the middle of the day after dinner is eaten, David went to the servants' rooms (I followed on his heels with a sinking heart) and called Vassily out. The latter was at first unwilling to come, but ended by obeying and following us into the garden.

David stood close in front of him. Vassily was a whole head taller.

"Vassily Terentyev," my comrade began in a firm voice, "six weeks ago you took from under this very apple-tree the watch we hid there. You had no right to do so; it does not belong to you. Give it back at once!"

Vassily was taken aback, but at once recovered himself.

"What watch? What are you talking about? God bless you! I have no watch!"

"I know what I am saying and don't tell lies. You've got the watch, give it back."

"I've not got your watch."

## THE WATCH

"Then how was it that in the eating-house, you . . ." I began, but David stopped me.

"Vassily Terentyev!" he pronounced in a hollow, threatening voice, "we know for a fact that you have the watch. You are told honourably to give it back and if you don't . . ."

Vassily sniggered insolently.

"Then what will you do with me then? Eh?"

"What will we do? We will both fight with you till you beat us or we beat you."

Vassily laughed.

"Fight? That's not for a gentleman! To fight with a servant!"

David suddenly caught hold of Vassily's waistcoat.

"But we are not going to fight you with our fists," he articulated, grinding his teeth. "Understand that! I'll give you a knife and take one myself. . . . And then we shall see who does for which? Alexey!" he began commanding me, "run for my big knife, you know the one with the bone handle—it's lying on the table and the other's in my pocket."

Vassily positively collapsed. David stood holding him by the waistcoat.

"Mercy on us! . . . Mercy on us, David

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

Yegoritch!" he muttered; tears actually came into his eyes. "What do you mean, what are you saying? Let me go."

"I won't let you go. And we shall have no mercy on you! If you get away from us to-day, we shall begin again to-morrow. Alyoshka, where's the knife?"

"David Yegoritch," wailed Vassily, "don't commit murder. . . . What are you doing! The watch . . . I certainly . . . I was joking. I'll give it to you this minute. What a thing, to be sure! First you are going to slit Hrisanf Lukitch's belly, then mine. Let me go, David Yegoritch. . . . Kindly take the watch. Only don't tell your papa."

David let go his hold of Vassily's waistcoat. I looked into his face: certainly not only Vassily might have been frightened by it. It looked so weary . . . and cold . . . and angry. . . .

Vassily dashed into the house and promptly returned with the watch in his hand. He gave it to David without a word and only on going back into the house exclaimed aloud in the doorway:

"Tfoo! here's a go."

## THE WATCH

He still looked panic-stricken. David tossed his head and walked into our room. Again I followed on his heels. "A Suvorov! He's a regular Suvorov!" I thought to myself. In those days, in 1801, Suvorov was our great national hero.

### XVIII

David shut the door after him, put the watch on the table, folded his arms and—oh, wonder!—laughed. Looking at him I laughed, too.

"What a wonderful performance!" he began. "We can't get rid of this watch anyway. It's bewitched, really. And why was I so furious about it?"

"Yes, why?" I repeated. "You ought to have let Vassily keep it. . . ."

"Well, no," interposed David. "That's nonsense. But what are we to do with it?"

"Yes! what?"

We both stared at the watch and pondered. Adorned with a chain of pale blue beads (the luckless Vassily in his haste had not removed this chain which belonged to him) it was calmly doing its work: ticking somewhat irregularly, it

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

is true, and slowly moving its copper minute hand.

"Shall we bury it again? Or put it in the stove," I suggested at last. "Or, I tell you what: shouldn't we take it to Latkin?"

"No," answered David. "That's not the thing. I know what: they have set up a committee at the governor's office and are collecting subscriptions for the benefit of the people of **Kasimov**. The town has been burnt to ashes with all its churches. And I am told they take anything, not only bread and money, but all sorts of things. Shall we send the watch there?"

"Yes! yes!" I answered. "A splendid idea. But I thought that since your friends are in want . . ."

"No, no; to the committee; the Latkins will manage without it. To the committee."

"Well, if it is to be the committee, let it be. Only, I imagine, we must write something to the governor."

David glanced at me. "Do you think so?"

"Yes, of course; there is no need to write much. But just a few words."

## THE WATCH

"For instance?"

"For instance . . . begin like this: 'Being' . . . or better: 'Moved by' . . ."

"'Moved by' . . . very good."

"Then we must say: 'herewith our mite' . . ."

"'Mite' . . . that's good, too. Well, take your pen, sit down and write, fire away!"

"First I must make a rough copy," I observed.

"All right, a rough copy, only write, write. . . . And meanwhile I will clean it with some whitening."

I took a sheet of paper, mended a pen, but before I had time to write at the top of the sheet "To His Excellency, the illustrious Prince" (our governor was at that time Prince X), I stopped, struck by the extraordinary uproar . . . which had suddenly arisen in the house. David noticed the hubbub, too, and he, too, stopped, holding the watch in his left hand and a rag with whitening in his right. We looked at each other. What was that shrill cry. It was my aunt shrieking . . . and that? It was my father's voice, hoarse with anger. "The watch! the watch!" bawled someone, surely Trank-



## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

villitatin. We heard the thud of feet, the creak of the floor, a regular rabble running . . . moving straight upon us. I was numb with terror and David was as white as chalk, but he looked proud as an eagle. "Vassily, the scoundrel, has betrayed us," he whispered through his teeth. The door was flung wide open, and my father in his dressing gown and without his cravat, my aunt in her dressing jacket, Trankvillitatin, Vassily, Yushka, another boy, and the cook, Agapit—all burst into the room.

"Scoundrels!" shouted my father, gasping for breath. . . . "At last we have found you out!" And seeing the watch in David's hands: "Give it here!" yelled my father, "give me the watch!"

But David, without uttering a word, dashed to the open window and leapt out of it into the yard and then off into the street.

Accustomed to imitate my paragon in everything, I jumped out, too, and ran after David. . . .

"Catch them! Hold them!" we heard a medley of frantic shouts behind us.

But we were already racing along the street

## THE WATCH

bareheaded, David in advance and I a few paces behind him, and behind us the clatter and uproar of pursuit.

### XIX

Many years have passed since the date of these events; I have reflected over them more than once—and to this day I can no more understand the cause of the fury that took possession of my father (who had so lately been so sick of the watch that he had forbidden it to be mentioned in his hearing) than I can David's rage at its having been stolen by Vassily! One is tempted to imagine that there was some mysterious power connected with it. Vassily had not betrayed us as David assumed—he was not capable of it: he had been too much scared—it was simply that one of our maids had seen the watch in his hands and had promptly informed our aunt. The fat was in the fire!

And so we darted down the street, keeping to the very middle of it. The passers-by who met us stopped or stepped aside in amazement. I remember a retired major craned out of the window of his flat—and, crimson in the face,

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

his bulky person almost overbalancing, hallooed furiously. Shouts of "Stop! hold them" still resounded behind us.

David ran flourishing the watch over his head and from time to time leaping into the air; I jumped, too, whenever he did.

"Where?" I shouted to David, seeing that he was turning into a side street—and I turned after him.

"To the Oka!" he shouted. "To throw it into the water, into the river. To the devil!"

"Stop! stop!" they shouted behind.

But we were already flying along the side street, already a whiff of cool air was meeting us—and the river lay before us, and the steep muddy descent to it, and the wooden bridge with a train of waggons stretching across it, and a garrison soldier with a pike beside the flagstaff; soldiers used to carry pikes in those days. David reached the bridge and darted by the soldier who tried to give him a blow on the legs with his pike and hit a passing calf. David instantly leaped on to the parapet; he uttered a joyful exclamation. . . . Something white, something blue gleamed in the air and shot into the water—it was the silver watch with

## THE WATCH

Vassily's blue bead chain flying into the water. . . . But then something incredible happened. After the watch David's feet flew upwards—and head foremost, with his hands thrust out before him and the lapels of his jacket fluttering, he described an arc in the air (as frightened frogs jump on hot days from a high bank into a pond) and instantly vanished behind the parapet of the bridge . . . and then flop! and a tremendous splash below.

What happened to me I am utterly unable to describe. I was some steps from David when he leapt off the parapet . . . but I don't even remember whether I cried out; I don't think that I was even frightened: I was stunned, stupefied. I could not stir hand or foot. People were running and hustling round me; some of them seemed to be people I knew. I had a sudden glimpse of Trofimitch, the soldier with the pike dashed off somewhere, the horses and the waggons passed by quickly, tossing up their noses covered with string. Then everything was green before my eyes and someone gave me a violent shove on my head and all down my back . . . I fell fainting.

I remember that I came to myself after-

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

wards and seeing that no one was paying any attention to me went up to the parapet but not on the side that David had jumped. It seemed terrible to me to approach it, and as I began gazing into the dark blue muddy swollen river, I remember that I noticed a boat moored to the bridge not far from the bank, and several people in the boat, and one of these, who was drenched all over and sparkling in the sun, bending over the edge of the boat was pulling something out of the water, something not very big, oblong, a dark thing which at first I took to be a portmanteau or a basket; but when I looked more intently I saw that the thing was—David. Then in violent excitement I shouted at the top of my voice and ran towards the boat, pushing my way through the people, but when I had run down to it I was overcome with timidity and began looking about me. Among the people who were crowding about it I recognised Trankvillitatin, the cook Agapit with a boot in his hand, Yushka, Vassily . . . the wet and shining man held David's body under the arms, drew him out of the boat and laid him on his back on the mud of the bank. Both David's

## THE WATCH

hands were raised to the level of his face as though he were trying to hide himself from strange eyes; he did not stir but lay as though standing at attention, with his heels together and his stomach out. His face was greenish—his eyes were staring and water was dripping from his hair. The wet man who had pulled him out, a factory hand, judging by his clothes, began describing how he had done it, shivering with cold and continually throwing back his hair from his forehead as he talked. He told his story in a very proper and painstaking way.

"What do I see, friends? This young lad go flying from the bridge. . . . Well! . . . I ran down at once the way of the current for I knew he had fallen into mid-stream and it would carry him under the bridge and there . . . talk of the devil! . . . I looked: something like a fur cap was floating and it was his head. Well, quick as thought, I was in the water and caught hold of him. . . . It didn't need much cleverness for that!"

Two or three words of approval were audible in the crowd.

"You ought to have something to warm you

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

now. Come along and we will have a drink," said someone.

But at this point all at once somebody pushed forward abruptly: it was Vassily.

"What are you doing, good Christians?" he cried, tearfully. "We must bring him to by rolling him; it's our young gentleman!"

"Roll him, roll him," shouted the crowd, which was continually growing.

"Hang him up by the feet! it's the best way!"

"Lay him with his stomach on the barrel and roll him backwards and forwards. . . . Take him, lads."

"Don't dare to touch him," put in the soldier with the pike. "He must be taken to the police station."

"Low brute," Trofimitch's bass voice rang out.

"But he is alive," I shouted at the top of my voice and almost with horror. I had put my face near to his. "So that is what the drowned look like," I thought, with a sinking heart. . . . And all at once I saw David's lips stir and a little water oozed from them. . . .

## THE WATCH

At once I was pushed back and dragged away; everyone rushed up to him.

"Roll him, roll him," voices clamoured.

"No, no, stay," shouted Vassily. "Take him home. . . .Take him home!"

"Take him home," Trankvillitin himself chimed in.

"We will bring him to. We can see better there," Vassily went on. . . . (I have liked him from that day.) "Lads, haven't you a sack? If not we must take him by his head and his feet. . . ."

"Stay! Here's a sack! Lay him on it! Catch hold! Start! That's fine. As though he were driving in a chaise."

A few minutes later David, borne in triumph on the sack, crossed the threshold of our house again.

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He was undressed and put to bed. He began to give signs of life while in the street, moaned, moved his hands. . . . Indoors he came to himself completely. But as soon as all anxiety for his life was over and there was



## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

no reason to worry about him, indignation got the upper hand again: everyone shunned him, as though he were a leper.

"May God chastise him! May God chastise him!" my aunt shrieked, to be heard all over the house. "Get rid of him, somehow, Porfiry Petrovitch, or he will do some mischief beyond all bearing."

"Upon my word, he is a viper; he is possessed with a devil," Trankvillitatin chimed in.

"The wickedness, the wickedness!" cackled my aunt, going close to the door of our room so that David might be sure to hear her. "First of all he stole the watch and then flung it into the water . . . as though to say, no one should get it. . . ."

Everyone, everyone was indignant.

"David," I asked him as soon as we were left alone, "what did you do it for?"

"So you are after that, too," he answered in a voice that was still weak; his lips were blue and he looked as though he were swollen all over. "What did I do?"

"But what did you jump into the water for?"

"Jump! I lost my balance on the parapet,

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that was all. If I had known how to swim I should have jumped on purpose. I shall certainly learn. But the watch now—ah . . .”

But at that moment my father walked with a majestic step into our room.

“You, my fine fellow,” he said, addressing me, “I shall certainly whip, you need have no doubt about that, though you are too big to lie on the bench now.”

Then he went up to the bed on which David was lying. “In Siberia,” he began in an impressive and dignified tone, “in Siberia, sir, in penal servitude, in the mines, there are people living and dying who are less guilty, less criminal than you. Are you a suicide or simply a thief or altogether a fool? Be so kind as to tell me just that!”

“I am not a suicide and I am not a thief,” answered David, “but the truth’s the truth: there are good men in Siberia, better than you or I . . . who should know that, if not you?”

My father gave a subdued gasp, drew back a step, looked intently at David, spat on the floor and, slowly crossing himself, walked away.

“Don’t you like that?” David called after

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him and put his tongue out. Then he tried to get up but could not.

"I must have hurt myself somehow," he said, gasping and frowning. "I remember the water dashed me against a post."

"Did you see Raissa?" he added suddenly.

"No. I did not. . . . Stay, stay, stay! Now I remember, wasn't it she standing on the bank by the bridge? . . . Yes . . . yes . . . a dark dress . . . a yellow kerchief on her head, yes it must have been Raissa."

"Well, and afterwards. . . . Did you see her?"

"Afterwards . . . I don't know, I had no thought to spare for her. . . . You jumped in . . ."

David was suddenly roused. "Alyosha, darling, go to her at once, tell her I am all right, that there's nothing the matter with me. To-morrow I shall be with them. Go as quickly as you can, brother, for my sake!"

David held out both hands to me. . . . His red hair, by now dry, stuck up in amusing tufts. . . . But the softened expression of his face seemed the more genuine for that. I took my

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cap and went out of the house, trying to avoid meeting my father and reminding him of his promise.

### XXI

"Yes, indeed," I reflected as I walked towards the Latkins', "how was it that I did not notice Raissa? What became of her? She must have seen. . . ."

And all at once I remembered that the very moment of David's fall, a terrible piercing shriek had rung in my ears.

"Was not that Raissa? But how was it I did not see her afterwards?"

Before the little house in which Latkin lodged there stretched a waste-ground overgrown with nettles and surrounded by a broken hurdle. I had scarcely clambered over the hurdle (there was no gate anywhere) when the following sight met my eyes: Raissa, with her elbows on her knees and her chin propped on her clasped hands, was sitting on the lowest step in front of the house; she was looking fixedly straight before her; near her stood her little dumb sister with the utmost com-

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

posure brandishing a little whip, while, facing the steps with his back to me, old Latkin, in torn and shabby drawers and high felt boots, was trotting and prancing up and down, capering and jerking his elbows. Hearing my footsteps he suddenly turned round and squatted on his heels—then at once, skipping up to me, began speaking very rapidly in a trembling voice, incessantly repeating, “Tchoo—tchoo—tchoo!” I was dumbfounded. I had not seen him for a long time and should not, of course, have known him if I had met him anywhere else. That red, wrinkled, toothless face, those lustreless round eyes and touzled grey hair, those jerks and capers, that senseless halting speech! What did it mean? What inhuman despair was torturing this unhappy creature? What dance of death was this?

“Tchoo—tchoo,” he muttered, wriggling incessantly. “See Vassilyevna here came in tchoo—tchoo, just now. . . . Do you hear? With a trough on the roof” (he slapped himself on the head with his hand), “and there she sits like a spade, and she is cross-eyed, cross-eyed, like Andryushka; Vassilyevna is cross-

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eyed" (he probably meant to say dumb), "tchoo! My Vassilyevna is cross-eyed! They are both on the same cork now. You may wonder, good Christians! I have only these two little boats! Eh?"

Latkin was evidently conscious that he was not saying the right thing and made terrible efforts to explain to me what was the matter. Raissa did not seem to hear what her father was saying and the little sister went on lashing the whip.

"Good-bye, diamond-merchant, good-bye, good-bye," Latkin drawled several times in succession, making a low bow, seeming delighted at having at last got hold of an intelligible word.

My head began to go round.

"What does it all mean?" I asked of an old woman who was looking out of the window of the little house.

"Well, my good gentleman," she answered in a sing-song voice, "they say some man—the Lord only knows who—went and drowned himself and she saw it. Well, it gave her a fright or something; when she came home she seemed

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

all right though; but when she sat down on the step—here, she has been sitting ever since like an image, it's no good talking to her. I suppose she has lost her speech, too. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

"Good-bye, good-bye," Latkin kept repeating, still with the same bow.

I went up to Raissa and stood directly facing her.

"Raissa, dear, what's the matter with you?"

She made no answer, she seemed not to notice me. Her face had not grown pale, had not changed—but had turned somehow stony and there was a look in it as though she were just falling asleep.

"She is cross-eyed, cross-eyed," Latkin muttered in my ear.

I took Raissa by the hand. "David is alive," I cried, more loudly than before. "Alive and well; David's alive, do you understand? He was pulled out of the water; he is at home now and told me to say that he will come to you to-morrow; he is alive!" As it were with effort Raissa turned her eyes on me; she blinked several times, opening them wider and wider,

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then leaned her head on one side and flushed slightly all over while her lips parted . . . she slowly drew in a deep breath, winced as though in pain and with fearful effort articulated:

"Da . . . Dav . . . a . . . alive," got up impulsively and rushed away.

"Where are you going?" I exclaimed. But with a faint laugh she ran staggering across the waste-ground. . . .

I, of course, followed her, while behind me a wail rose up in unison from the old man and the child. . . . Raissa darted straight to our house.

"Here's a day!" I thought, trying not to lose sight of the black dress that was fluttering before me. "Well!"

## XXII

Passing Vassily, my aunt, and even Trankvillitin, Raissa ran into the room where David was lying and threw herself on his neck. "Oh . . . oh . . . Da . . . vidushka," her voice rang out from under her loose curls, "oh!"

Flinging wide his arms David embraced her and nestled his head against her.



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"Forgive me, my heart," I heard his voice saying.

And both seemed swooning with joy.

"But why did you go home, Raissa, why didn't you stay?" I said to her. . . . She still kept her head bowed. "You would have seen that he was saved. . . ."

"Ah, I don't know! Ah, I don't know. Don't ask. I don't know, I don't remember how I got home. I only remember: I saw you in the air . . . something seemed to strike me . . . and what happened afterwards . . ."

"Seemed to strike you," repeated David, and we all three suddenly burst out laughing together. We were very happy.

"What may be the meaning of this, may I ask," we heard behind us a threatening voice, the voice of my father. He was standing in the doorway. "Will there ever be an end to these fooleries? Where are we living? Are we in the Russian Empire or the French Republic?"

He came into the room.

"Anyone who wants to be rebellious and immoral had better go to France! And how dare

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*you come here?"* he said, turning to Raissa, who, quietly sitting up and turning to face him, was evidently taken aback but still smiled as before, a friendly and blissful smile.

"The daughter of my sworn enemy! How dare you? And hugging him, too! Away with you at once, or . . ."

"Uncle," David brought out, and he sat up in bed. "Don't insult Raissa. She is going away, only don't insult her."

"And who are you to teach me? I am not insulting her, I am not in . . . sul . . . ting her! I am simply turning her out of the house. I have an account to settle with you, too, presently. You have made away with other people's property, have attempted to take your own life, have put me to expense."

"To what expense?" David interrupted.

"What expense? You have ruined your clothes. Do you count that as nothing? And I had to tip the men who brought you. You have given the whole family a fright and are you going to be unruly now? And if this young woman, regardless of shame and honour itself . . ."

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

David made a dash as though to get out of bed.

"Don't insult her, I tell you."

"Hold your tongue."

"Don't dare . . ."

"Hold your tongue!"

"Don't dare to insult my betrothed," cried David at the top of his voice, "my future wife!"

"Betrothed!" repeated my father, with round eyes. "Betrothed! Wife! Ho, ho, ho! . . ." ("Ha, ha, ha," my aunt echoed behind the door.) "Why, how old are you? He's been no time in the world, the milk is hardly dry on his lips, he is a mere babe and he is going to be married! But I . . . but you . . ."

"Let me go, let me go," whispered Raissa, and she made for the door. She looked more dead than alive.

"I am not going to ask permission of you," David went on shouting, propping himself up with his fists on the edge of the bed, "but of my own father who is bound to be here one day soon; he is a law to me, but you are not; but as for my age, if Raissa and I are not old

## THE WATCH

enough . . . we will bide our time whatever you may say. . . .”

“Aië, aië, Davidka, don’t forget yourself,” my father interrupted. “Just look at yourself. You are not fit to be seen. You have lost all sense of decency.”

David put his hand to the front of his shirt.

“Whatever you may say . . .” he repeated.

“Oh, shut his mouth, Porfiry Petrovitch,” piped my aunt from behind the door, “shut his mouth, and as for this hussy, this baggage . . . this . . .”

But something extraordinary must have cut short my aunt’s eloquence at that moment: her voice suddenly broke off and in its place we heard another, feeble and husky with old age. . . .

“Brother,” this weak voice articulated, “Christian soul.”

## XXIII

We all turned round. . . . In the same costume in which I had just seen him, thin, pitiful and wild looking, Latkin stood before us like an apparition,

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

"God!" he pronounced in a sort of childish way, pointing upwards with a bent and trembling finger and gazing impotently at my father, "God has chastised me, but I have come for Va. . . for Ra . . . yes, yes, for Raissotchka. . . . What . . . tchoo! what is there for me? Soon underground—and what do you call it? One little stick, another . . . cross-beam—that's what I . . . want, but you, brother, diamond-merchant . . . mind . . . I'm a man, too!"

Raissa crossed the room without a word and taking his arm buttoned his vest.

"Let us go, Vassilyevna," he said; "they are all saints here, don't come to them and he lying there in his case"—he pointed to David—"is a saint, too, but you and I are sinners, brother. Come. Tchoo. . . . Forgive an old man with a pepper pot, gentleman! We have stolen together!" he shouted suddenly; "stolen together, stolen together!" he repeated, with evident satisfaction that his tongue had obeyed him at last.

Everyone in the room was silent. "And

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where is . . . the ikon here," he asked, throwing back his head and turning up his eyes; "we must cleanse ourselves a bit." ~

He fell to praying to one of the corners, crossing himself fervently several times in succession, tapping first one shoulder and then the other with his fingers and hurriedly repeating:

• "Have mercy me, oh, Lor . . . me, oh, Lor . . . me, oh, Lor . . ." My father, who had not taken his eyes off Latkin, and had not uttered a word, suddenly started, stood beside him and began crossing himself, too. Then he turned to him, bowed very low so that he touched the floor with one hand, saying, "You forgive me, too, Martinyan Gavrilitch," kissed him on the shoulder. Latkin in response smacked his lips in the air and blinked: I doubt whether he quite knew what he was doing. Then my father turned to everyone in the room, to David, to Raissa and to me:

"Do as you like, act as you think best," he brought out in a soft and mournful voice, and he withdrew.

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

My aunt was running up to him, but he cried out sharply and gruffly to her. He was overwhelmed.

"Me, oh, Lor . . . me, oh, Lor . . . mercy!" Latkin repeated. "I am a man."

"Good-bye, Davidushka," said Raissa, and she, too, went out of the room with the old man.

"I will be with you to-morrow," David called after her, and, turning his face to the wall, he whispered: "I am very tired; it will be as well to have some sleep now," and was quiet.

It was a long while before I went out of the room. I kept in hiding. I could not forget my father's threats. But my apprehensions turned out to be unnecessary. He met me and did not utter a word. He seemed to feel awkward himself. But night soon came on and everything was quiet in the house.

## XXIV

Next morning David got up as though nothing were the matter and not long after, on the same day, two important events occurred: in the morning old Latkin died, and towards evening my uncle, Yegor, David's father, ar-

## THE WATCH

rived in Ryazan. Without sending any letter in advance, without warning anyone, he descended on us like snow on our heads. My father was completely taken aback and did not know what to offer to his dear guest and where to make him sit. He rushed about as though delirious, was flustered as though he were guilty; but my uncle did not seem to be much touched by his brother's fussy solicitude; he kept repeating: "What's this for?" or "I don't want anything." His manner with my aunt was even colder; she had no great liking for him, indeed. In her eyes he was an infidel, a heretic, a Voltairian . . . (he had in fact learnt French to read Voltaire in the original). I found my Uncle Yegor just as David had described him. He was a big heavy man with a broad pock-marked face, grave and serious. He always wore a hat with feathers in it, cuffs, a frilled shirt front and a snuff-coloured vest and a sword at his side. David was unspeakably delighted to see him—he actually looked brighter in the face and better looking, and his eyes looked different: merrier, keener, more shining; but he did his utmost to mod-



## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

erate his joy and not to show it in words: he was afraid of being too soft. The first night after Uncle Yegor's arrival, father and son shut themselves up in the room that had been assigned to my uncle and spent a long time talking together in a low voice; next morning I saw that my uncle looked particularly affectionately and trustfully at his son: he seemed very much pleased with him. David took him to the requiem service for Latkin; I went to it, too, my father did not hinder my going but remained at home himself. Raissa impressed me by her calm: she looked pale and much thinner but did not shed tears and spoke and behaved with perfect simplicity; and with all that, strange to say, I saw a certain grandeur in her; the unconscious grandeur of sorrow forgetful of itself! Uncle Yegor made her acquaintance on the spot, in the church porch; from his manner to her, it was evident that David had already spoken of her. He was as pleased with her as with his son: I could read that in David's eyes when he looked at them both. I remember how his eyes sparkled when his father said, speaking of her:

## THE WATCH

"She's a clever girl; she'll make a capable woman." At the Latkins' I was told that the old man had quietly expired like a candle that has burnt out, and that until he had lost power and consciousness, he kept stroking his daughter's head and saying something unintelligible but not gloomy, and he was smiling to the end. My father went to the funeral and to the service in the church and prayed very devoutly; Trankvillitatin actually sang in the choir.

Beside the grave Raissa suddenly broke into sobs and sank forward on the ground; but she soon recovered herself. Her little deaf and dumb sister stared at everyone and everything with big, bright, rather wild-looking eyes; from time to time she huddled up to Raissa, but there was no sign of terror about her. The day after the funeral Uncle Yegor, who, judging from appearances, had not come back from Siberia with empty hands (*he* paid for the funeral and liberally rewarded David's rescuer) but who told us nothing of his doings there or of his plans for the future, Uncle Yegor suddenly informed my father that he did not intend to remain in Ryazan, but was

## KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK

going to Moscow with his son. My father, from a feeling of propriety, expressed regret and even tried—very faintly it is true—to induce my uncle to alter his decision, but at the bottom of his heart, I think he was really much relieved.

The presence of his brother with whom he had very little in common, who did not even condescend to reproach him, whose feeling for him was more one of simple disgust than disdain—oppressed him . . . and parting with David could not have caused him much regret. I, of course, was utterly crushed by the separation; I was utterly desolate at first and lost all support in life and all interest in it.

And so my uncle went away and took with him not only David but, to the great astonishment and even indignation of our whole street, Raissa and her little sister, too. . . . When she heard of this, my aunt promptly called him a Turk, and called him a Turk to the end of her days.

And I was left alone, alone . . . but this story is not about me.

## THE WATCH

### XXV

So this is the end of my tale of the watch. What more have I to tell you? Five years after David was married to his Black-lip, and in 1812, as a lieutenant of artillery, he died a glorious death on the battlefield of Borodino in defence of the Shevardinsky redoubt.

• Much water has flowed by since then and I have had many watches; I have even attained the dignity of a real repeater with a second hand and the days of the week on it. But in a secret drawer of my writing table there is preserved an old-fashioned silver watch with a rose on the face; I bought it from a Jewish pedlar, struck by its likeness to the watch which was once presented to me by my godfather. From time to time, when I am alone and expect no one, I take it out of the drawer and looking at it remember my young days and the companion of those days that have fled never to return.

Paris.—1875.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
WOODS AND SONS, LTD., LONDON, N.I.





